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Abstract

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KUNAPIPI

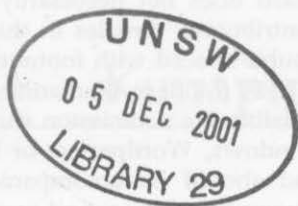
Journal of Post-Colonial Writing





KUNAPIPI

Journal of Post-Colonial Writing



VOLUME XX NUMBER 2
1998

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Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

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Kunapipi

VOLUME XX NUMBER 2, 1998

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We wish to thank all contributors to this journal and Shaun Levin extends a special thanks to Ms Rulumeni at South Africa House for her help with Xhosa words in his story.

Front cover: Celtic Cross, A.N. Jeffares 1998

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

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EDITORIAL

Everything is propaganda for what you believe in ... I don't see that it could be otherwise. The harder and more deeply you believe in anything the more in a sense you're a propagandist. Conviction fathers propaganda. I don't know, I have never been able to reach the conclusion that that's a bad word.

Dorothea Lange

There is no such things as an unpolitical book. Even the very thought that art could be unpolitical, is political.

F. A. Ajayi

In fact, as a *woman*, I have no country. As a woman I want no country.

Three Guineas, Virginia Woolf

As the cover indicates the dominant theme of this issue is the so-called 'Irish Question'. Whilst not all the material is directly related to Ireland the issues raised in the literature, essays and statements all relate in one way or another: to colonialism, neo-colonialism, refugees, multiculturalism, dispossession, racism – all issues one expects to find in a journal of post-colonialism.

One could not for one moment write about Ireland and not expect conflict and I don't expect this issue to be an exception. One of the aspects of *Kunapipi* has been the publication of articles bound to cause dissension. The policy has always been to allow those with another point of view to respond. That offer still stands.

Tony Blair has finally apologized to the Irish for the potato famine and admitted that it was not the purgatory which the Irish had to go through before they could reach the promised land – America. Actually, it was easy to see it as it really was, an example of a man-made disaster with which the peoples of the colonized countries are regularly afflicted to this day, and to see parallels between it and for example, the political and economic disasters which drive millions of migrants to Europe and the USA. And it is quite easy to see why one group of underdogs would side with another. Elleke Boehmer's story illustrates this as does Patrick Colm Hogan's poem, where one colonized group, the West-Indians, have drawn on another colonized island, both subjected to the loss of land and language to make a new literature of their own. It is not an accident that Walcott called Joyce 'our age's Omeros'. Nor is it surprising that the leader of Australia's major revolt, 'The Eureka Stockade', was led by an Irishman and that our greatest folk hero is Ned Kelly.

Yet another interesting but little known example of lines between oppressed peoples occurred during the Irish potato famine in 1847 when a group of Native Americans, the Choctaws sent over American dollars to aid the starving Irish. This act of generosity, little known to most people, was commemorated in 1992 when seven Irishmen went to the United States to thank the Choctaws and organized a memorial walk following the trail taken by the Choctaws, who had been forcibly moved from Mississippi to Oklahoma. They set off from Oklahoma where they first met the Choctaws and participated in a Choctaw tribal ceremony. They were joined by eight more Irishmen and re-enacted what they called the Trail of Tears in reverse, eventually arriving at the Choctaw original homeland. The Choctaws made the

Irish honorary members of their tribe and the Irishmen donated their boots to the Choctaw memorial museum.

We have all seen the consequences of divide and rule, a policy to ensure power for the few who lust after it, and misery, chaos, destruction and a manipulated hatred for the majority, who, given the chance would live in peace with their neighbours, even when their culture may be different from their own. It's not only the politicians lusting after power. It's those other Empires as well. In A.K. Whitehead's case it is the Catholic Church. Some of the leaders seem completely unaware that the individual people have grasped the idea that it is not the clergy's church, it is everyone's. And of course, as usual, we have the serpent in the form of Eve peddling her apples. Pope John Paul II's recent remarks on for example contraception and women priests (see the *Guardian*, page 1, July 7, 1998) make the Council of Trent (1543-1563) look radical. Why did I join seventy thousand people to converge on Birmingham as a peaceful protest, when the Group of Seven met there, to beg them to break the Third World's chain of debt. This was to have been top of the agenda at the Lambeth Conference. Instead the agenda became hijacked by a hate campaign against gays and in some cases women priests. God loves us all we are assured but it would appear in the sight of some, as it did to Orwell, that He loves some more than others.

On the evening of September 12, 1993, I was lying in a hospitable bed in Denmark watching television. The feature film turned out to be *The Way We Were* (1973), which was a film discussing the nature of commitment, featuring Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford. It will surprise few of the readers of *Kunapipi* that my sympathy lay with Katie, whom we first meet as a young Jewish undergraduate, a member of the Communist Party addressing the group of young upper-class undergraduates on the evils of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini and urging them to do something about it. Her pleas fell on deaf ears, and although she became part of the group when she married Hubbell the marriage eventually ended in divorce. She is proved right, of course, and many suffered under the McCarthy era as she had predicted. In the final scene she accidentally meets Hubbell, they speak briefly then part. As they do so we see her on a busy corner handing out leaflets and shouting 'ban nuclear weapons'. 'You never give up do you?', Hubbell calls to her and I liked her answer. 'Never'.

To return finally to Ireland. Again, whilst in hospital, I watched Tim Sebastian interview Mary McAleese, who is now President of the Republic of Ireland. Her own background is very much tied up with the violence and troubles in Ireland. Being a Catholic and nationalist living in Belfast she knew only too well the horrors of the last thirty years. The family house was burned down, her handicapped brother was tortured by protestant youths and a woman was killed in a car bomb placed outside her father's pub in the Falls Road. She told how the whole family went to mass and never returned to their home. Asked if she was bitter her answer was 'No,' and in reply to the question how had her family not been, she answered that what had saved them was their belief in the gospel of love and forgiveness. The interview took place after Omagh. There is no denying the tragedy, but as she said, so much evil was visited on that small village that it created a global unity and showed the triumph of goodness and love. The fragile peace plant was made more robust, and united groups determined to look to the future not to the past.

Earlier on in the interview Mary McAleese had emphasized that Ireland's

greatest gift to the world had been her people – seventy million (Ireland today has a population of five million). ‘We know,’ she said, ‘what it’s like to be refugees, poor and unwanted and we can only hope that it has given us a greater tolerance of other cultures.’ She insisted that there was an Irish culture and there were other cultures and in an increasingly multicultural world one must come to recognize and respect this fact. A good deal of hope and admiration may arise from the fact that such words of forgiveness and tolerance should come from an Irish woman at the end of the twentieth century, the ‘Entrenchment, concentrated gunfire, the “efficient” heaping up of horrors’ inaugurated by the Boer War which ‘set the pattern for hostilities between man and man for years to come’ as spoken by Kathleen in Elleke Boehmer’s novel extract, in this issue. Although hostility is by no means foreign to Danny Morrison, he too wants to point beyond to the future as the last paragraph in his statement shows:

I thought to myself: the days of intransigence, the days of bombast, the days of bombing are over. But it is shameful that we shall live on the backs of the dead. Not just one killed, not just three, not just four, but an unconscionable toll ... Hopefully, it will all look slightly different through the prism of time, and there will come a time when there will not be red, when there will not be black, the colours of blood and despair, but there will be blue, the blue skies of peace.

Dear Future ...

Anna Rutherford



Punch, London 8 April 1848. The character who is fully simianized with the fool's cap is John Mitchell, who because of his rhetoric about the famine in Ireland, was prosecuted under the new Treason Felony and sentenced to fourteen years transportation to Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) in May 1848. See stanza one of the poem by Patrick Colm Hogan, 'Caribbean Dedalus'.

ELLEKE BOEHMER

Fatality

Intombi Field Hospital,
Ladysmith
Saturday 3 March 1900

My very dear Aunt Margaret

How long it has been since my January letters! How many times I have tried in vain to send but one or two lines assuring you that I remain well in body and certainly determined, despite the dejected exhaustion last described. Wounds and diseases however are no respecters of war or its fortunes. While the past week has given us many reasons to rejoice, our hospital work has been if anything more consuming, especially since a particularly violent form of dysentery closed its grip on the camp.

Yes, the siege is lifted. Celebratory fireworks have not ceased to explode every night in the streets. You will doubtless have heard the news almost as soon as we did, for Ladysmith has widely been seen as the keystone of the Republican resistance. Queen Victoria herself telegraphed congratulations to the town.

Even as I write revelry roars from the mess tent. Our daily rations still consist of no more than a tin of preserved mutton and biscuits, however a store of Jameson's whisky from the Ladysmith Headquarters, hoarded for this purpose, has been liberally distributed among the men, reaching even Intombi camp.

Several officers are wearing bits of shredded Union Jack in their buttonholes. Worn thin by sunlight, the Ladysmith HQ flag was pulled down and torn in the general excitement. It is a contradictory symbol, affecting me in ways of which I do not dare openly speak.

The first sign of relief (if so it can be called) was the almost imperceptible presence of movement in the suffocating stillness of the land. The day – the 28th – began cloudy. Under the dense light the rolling downs to the south seemed even more dramatically than usual to present themselves as a strange dreamscape. The pearly pinks and blues outlined in dark shadow, the whole ineffably peaceful. And yet across these same hills General Redvers (or 'Reverse'!) Buller had for days been invisibly leapfrogging his men and guns, with shattering consequences for the Boers.

Less than a week ago the warring sides went so far as to declare a half-day armistice to collect their mutilated dead and wounded from the hills. It was the first time in history that white men smashed up by explosives had been left out overnight horribly to die. So says our camp commandant, who served also in the Crimea. What a darkling thought it is that this war which so balefully opens the new century will set the pattern for hostilities between man and man for years to come. Entrenchment, concentrated gunfire, the 'efficient' heaping up of horrors.

'Retreat, retreat!' The exultant cry came from the direction of the big gun's hill. And, sure enough, when I ran up Outlook Kop it was clearly visible. Across the still hot hills where for so many weeks they had lain unseen, the Boers in great dark clusters were riding away to the north, moving with incredible speed. Alongside them curved the shimmering white serpent of their canvas-backed supply wagons, here and there bogged down in a nullah, but still steadily, relentlessly, driving on and away. It was like an accelerated but utterly silent great trek, these stalwart commandos still looking powerful, impressive, and free, or at least freely escaping, even in defeat.

As I gazed out I almost felt the tears come. I was not in any sense as moved when about five hours later, after a violent thunderstorm, two tired-looking squadrons of British infantry came splashing down the road that runs by the camp, and passed into Ladysmith with the fading light.

And yet it would have been difficult to ignore the electrical transport of relief running through the liberated town. After almost 120 days of near-starvation people were delirious with joy. Off-duty I was able to join the throngs cheering on the pavements. For a few hours creed and colour were forgotten as Zulus shook hands with English officers, and gaunt and convalescent garrison soldiers embraced their fit but battle-worn fellows. Indian, Irish, Xhosa, German civilians; cattle-rustlers, nurses, nuns, court reporters, storekeepers, housewives, any number of people, smiled and laughed together. The now nearly famous hotelier Mr Gruber distributed, in fun, platters of siege-fare. Cubed and very dry horse-steak, going cheap.

Friday 16 March 1900

Dear Aunt, there I broke off, called to the sick bed of an elderly Italian lady from the town. She had been subsisting for some weeks on puddings of face powder. She has I am glad to say recovered. But is one of the few.

We transport our cartloads of dead to nearby battlefields where trenches not yet filled with fatalities are used as mass graves.

Though there is little opportunity for reflection, thoughts on the war still wring my mind. Truth to tell, I have been so very involved with these

thoughts that sleep, even when I do lie down, is elusive. At times it is the faces of the wounded distorted by their pain, I cannot forget these faces. At other times it is smells, the oozing fluids of the dying. I feel their stickiness between my fingers.

I find some relief walking through the camp in the cool of night but dread to think this may draw comment. A doctor has prescribed chloroform, a few drops each evening. At least it blots my memory with short snatches of dreamless sleep.

My last letter expressed (ill-advisedly as you will hear) a growing sympathy for the Boers alongside troubled questions about the use of force to resist force. Having now seen more of the ghastly progress of the war, my doubts, I can say with certainty, have been utterly vanquished.

What has been cruelly and improperly wrenched away can only be won back with force: this I have now accepted, though with pain. Even considering the desperately unequal spread of men and arms that marks this war, retaliation is required of the downtrodden, the inequality itself demands it. As regards our situation here, it is already noteworthy that the British generals are asking questions about their apparent ineptitude over so many months at breaking the Boer siege.

Yes: what has been taken with force can only be won back with force, however horribly. Where a free people are hit as the Irish and the Boers have been hit, all they can do is hit back cunningly, and with impact if possible. The English understand no other language but that of the sword and the gun, and will have their reply.

If you see fit to use these lines at a Transvaal Committee meeting or in an article I would not object. I am no Irish brigadier, yet reports from the front line can help varnish a speech or sauce a resolution, as we know.

It seems that there are no depths to which Chamberlain will not stoop. Every day this week displaced farm folk, white and black, have crept into the camp, frightened at reports of British farm-burnings and evictions elsewhere in the country. These are no mere rumours. A family arrived from over the Free State mountains three days ago. The last they had seen of their farm was a column of smoke and flame against the evening sky, and a group of British soldiers driving their herd of cattle before them.

There was also the poignant tale brought by a young African-looking woman bizarrely attired in a Boer hat and tweed breeches who stumbled through our gates yesterday. She had walked for two days and nights from a farm in the Dundee district, in fear of her life and that of the child she says she is carrying. Severely dehydrated, she crept blindly into the bed we made her and woke late this morning, still croaky and a little distracted.

It appears that British troops (Buller's advance guard I suspect) battered their way into the homestead where she worked, demanding food and horses. The soldiers, she said (in surprisingly good sing-song English), spent several hours pitching the household goods into the yard, and

carting off candlesticks and metal plate.

The scene she described could not but remind me of the evictions inflicted upon our own Irish peasants in the West. Those magic lantern slides that were beamed onto the outdoor screen as part of the December protests. The old mother on a blanket on the ground. The family bed and the kitchen-dresser standing in the rain.

The soldiers in this girl's case were more interested in looting than in torching the farm, but even so she was understandably frightened. She was thinking of the child, 'the small soldier' she curiously says. She feared the British would discover that the farm had been supplying Boer troops with food since their invasion in the spring.

And not only this. On certain nights her 'master' had given accommodation to soldiers on the Boer side. Foreign soldiers with a song in their voice, she said. I knew at once she meant Irishmen. Brigaders. And one brigadier in particular, whose speech she has mimicked. Whose name she now bears. This African woman. Talking here in my tent an hour ago she called herself 'Dollie Macken'.

And her **man**, I asked carefully, using the Boer word for husband, what of him? Had he escaped north? Was he safe? He's a hero, she said curtly, of course he was safe. He'd ridden away into the hills with the retreating Boers but he'd fight his way back, smiling, to her. There was the happy smile he tossed over his shoulder, most brightly so when mounting his horse to ride into battle. She says she kept his smile 'tight' in her mind as she journeyed over battlefields still soft with the dead.

A piece of good news I can report is that the orphaned baby who slept beside me a month ago was sent out to nurse in a nearby Zulu village, and is thriving. On depressed afternoons I have gone over to see him. The people receive me impassively but with good will.

Due to the vigilance of the censor, our January letters may well have been held up by the war office in Durban, so the Belfast nurse Brid O'Donnell hears. If this is true, they will eventually I trust be returned to us. I intend to keep them (and if the situation continues this letter also) as a record to show you once I am back home. The Red Cross say, to my great relief, that they keep volunteers' families informed of their loved-ones' well-being.

I have given 'Dollie Macken' the small wooden supplies chest, your present, as well as a few pieces of my clothing. Please do not mind this. She arrived here with nothing. She plans to fill the chest with knitted goods for her baby.

Yours, with a full heart
Kathleen

Patrick Colm Hogan

CARIBBEAN DEDALUS

In the end, most went down to the ships.
Some we name. Others drowned in the straits,
or were abandoned at the early ports of call,
pronounced anathema for an unhealing wound;
some sought oblivion themselves, forgot
after long pain, the final dream
that would have made mere Purgatory of Inferno.
First, there was the petrifying gaze
and the crowd of faces pale as woodlice.
Then there was the cold, the longing for sun.
The promise, each year, of the voyage back,
of pounds set by from pay, or windfall –
imaginary as home or providence, it never came.
Life and craft stilled as the Sargasso Sea.
Even those who opened mouths to say or sing,
lacked, before all else, right words
for their imaginings, marooned already at the first port.
Uttering, they loathed the sounds that tumbled from their lips,
hated the language of their mother and their brothers, hated
equally the language of Kensington or Trench Town,
of Cambridge or of Monkey Hill – one too English,
the other not English enough, but stuff
of travesty, all broken vocables, ludicrous
transliteration for the comic pages: mockery
of legends below a simian caricature in *Punch*.
Home, God Ale, Man, Master,
how differently the words sound, here
and there, in London or in the windward village:

At dawn, scattered seawrack and peeling hulls,
churn of waves, struggle with the tightening net;
at night, beachfires, drink, the searing of scales –
things and acts no less sublime
than characterless towns of ragged Ithaka
that Homer sung. But years of Hellenism,
made alien Homer's voice and provenance.

The sounds jarred; the meanings would not hold.
The most admired models, the exemplary
forebears fused into the grotesque single form
of Iago with a pen and 500 a year.
Where griots sang like Homer, now lines
of blood dried to indecipherable alphabets.
Like Dhaka artisans, whose hands were severed at the thumb
by British blades, so that they would no longer weave
muslin thin as air – so too
it was as if the vocal chords of Antillean
bards were severed, centuries before;
the long sword cracking open the jaws,
plunging down into the lungs, and deep into the heart.

How, then, to shape the air of speech,
to recollect one's part in a continuing song.
Once, the heart of all was numinous Ife,
allmother and allfather, origin
of humankind, where dark, revered Oduduwa
touched earth and brought us forth.
There land and sky were reconciled,
celebrated generation, foreswore scarcity.
There the ancestors, with arms and words,
marked out the living place, named
the clans, contoured bronzes sensuous as Arp,
animate as Phidias. There, in unscripted epics
of home and voyage and now-nameless gods,
the muse of memory spoke customs of place
into the fragile permanence of passing words.
But a ghostly tribe appeared, white as leprosy,
deadly as Sonponna. They heard the song, bound
the singer at the pivot of the land and tore her tongue
out at the root. Like Philomel. The rest seemed
silence only – obliquity of gesture, mute
tracing of lips; the brute cry too
stifled at the throat in thick swells of blood.

In time, all could set out to write
against the colonial strain, 'write back',
crack the smooth surface of celebratory verse,
skew the regulated lines of rhyme and number.
But, equally, all needed to 'write through',
to organize the present life by gathering the past,
as one gathers flowers in a vase upon a table,
to make the *one* horizon of immediacy and of tradition

as the eye draws the wide expanse of sea
back to a single shore, or the mind centres
about the Oba's hut: deities, ancestors, great
rooted blossomers and the circulating life of beasts.
From need, these displaced makers sought to forge
once more the severed links, think
back through fathers and through mothers
to the pristine state, and from the numinous soil
of the early place unearth, still whole,
the mould of forms, to shape new figures
out of foreign clay. But, for some,
the cast was shivered and the shards could not
be reconciled to the bells of vases or of funerary urns,
or organized for common use by epoch or by region.
Too many names were swallowed by the sea;
too many practices of daily work
and mastery of art were shackled to the hold.
And who would pay their final passage
back to re-incarnate sacred words,
almost remembered skills of stress and sound?

So some sought models in another island,
blasted too for centuries by canons of dominion:
dark Ireland, and its people, the 'black Irish',
black at Howth, black at Phoenix Park –
blacker still in steady progress to the West,
the 'index of negrescence' rising through the bogs
toward Aran, toward apeneck Sweeney,
toward the 'White Hottentots' of Munster.
An Indian civil servant outside the Pale
observed the natives in their natural state.
I fancy him glimpsing, through a carriage window,
my father's father's father, blind, illiterate,
Gaeilgeoir agus Brigid, bean an tí,
seated before the two-room cottage in Culleen,
rented from the Big House on a footsoldier's pension
(my only link, the ledger of colonial census,
County Clare, 1901).
Emerging from the tír, this nation's guest confided
loathing in a sasanach's ear: *I cannot bear
to treat these Irish like white men.*

Both Celt and Caribbean lost language,
lost the rhythm and engagement of a practiced culture,
lost a sense of home and being at home.

For one brace of heritage, they substituted
 self-doubt, nagging as an abusive parent;
 exile, with its dull ache always at the root;
 and a pang of shame at the sound of their own voice.
 My father seeking to erase from all his speech
 the trace of Ennis; seated with the grammar book
 and with the dictionary of pronunciation;
 he mouthed out the 'correct' way of saying,
 word by word – Christ, home, master.
 He foreswore sounds he could not
 wrap his lips around in the American manner,
 would not speak words which still
 maintained the lilt and cadence of the Gaelic tongue.
 An oddity to say: I've never heard
 my father speak such a common word as 'cook'.

Words, then, first: their shape and order.
 In part by Synge – though Langston Hughes
 and others too – they were released to celebrate the rude,
 low, rustic talk of western isles,
 like Mallarmé, purifier le dialecte de la tribu –
 the bastard speech born of penal grammar
 and the attenuated recollection of lost words
 (a continuing habit of sound, a passing down
 of parts and of occluded patterns long after
 the whole has disappeared or the original fallen into desuetude);
 so now they could transcribe from the common tongue,
 not parodic babel and brute cries,
 but the voice of lost Mnemosynes, its inflections and its human
 pitch: poem against the sentences of empire.

Themes came too, by the same route;
 topics, and strategies. In Trinidad, the brothers
 Walcott made again the Abbey theatre
 with early plays of struggle against the sea –
 fishermen already Greek, already
 raised to tragical intensity, terrible beauty.

Then, after Synge and Yeats, came Joyce:
 'our age's Omeros', Walcott christens him:
 'undimmed Master'. How differently
 the word sounds here and there – master;
 an apostrophic echo of Dante to Virgil:
 '*Lo mio maestro e lo mio autore*':
 And, Virgil-like, 'Joyce/led us all'.

The first task is seeing epos in routine:
 A fisherman works the fraying cross of knots,
 unfolds and tests the net's tensile hold,
 another aligns his craft's prow and heaves
 out against the white breast of the dim sea;
 these two remake Hector and Achilles –
 not less *spoudaios* than their eponyms,
 not less large in spirit and in character,
 not less noble in action or in speech.
 (And yet not Joyce – not this negative of the ironic,
 this recursion to eulogy, and agon, and the scene of suffering.)
 They struggle for as great a prize as that contested
 by solitary Menelaus and doe-eyed Paris,
 or by gentle Bloom and all-conquering Boylan:
 they combat for the hand of dark-hued Helen.

Character too, and circumstance, he saw
 through Joyce's eyes, moreso than Homer's:
 Plunkett translates Deasy – colonizer and native,
 Protestant, widower, pedant, amateur, mock
 epic *miles gloriosus* of the master race.
 But here too parody's soothed with pathos,
 as in the memory drawn from Molly on Howth Head,
 a cliff, unconsummated farewell before the war –
 both scene and style mime 'Penelope'.

And, lastly, structure. Not Homer only,
 but the oneiric catastrophe at the farthest point:
 Achille ascends into a Paradiso of Mother Africa.
 But the dream recedes in unpurged images
 (like a wasted body in loose brown graveclothes).
 The sun sears his sleeping brain, sacred
 horror at his father's father's father manacled,
 with daimon-haunted men and girls, fishers,
 weavers, casters of bronze, and bards, transmuted
 into shackled beasts by a blue-eyed Circe.
 A nightmare from which he is trying to awaken: History.

Others saw in Stephen their own poetic
 selves, a mirrored model for the painter, painting.
 For Lamming, in part, a model too removed
 from grit of labour, from bosses and from demagogues –
 but, still, biographies told in mouldering clothes,
 with families' ragged stuffs heaped on a cart.
 For him, the seantithe razed, the carts

trascined up rutted paths, jostling
 loads of private history above the shore
 and waiting ships. Then English faces
 grinning at the open windows of rude cars,
 high, wild voices and strange noise.
 All things that bruised a young boy
 into poetry. *In the Castle of My Skin*: Lamming
 tells again the slow estrangement from mother
 and from motherland, the rough recoil of the mind, the spasm
 in the heart, the refusal to accept and serve all
 that had a part in making this condition, however named.
 His choice too, the voyage out.
 But, before, the dialectic of unequal mates,
 the matching up of Socrates with Glaucon,
 intervenes with its remembrance and its moral theme.
 Trumper calls him from the past, like Cranly or like Davin.
 But Trumper is Socrates in this exchange, and teaches
 that to know oneself is to feel affinity of skin
 in the group act, to see 'marvel of blackness' –
 the ending of *A Portrait*, pivoted upon a word,
 'race' fixed, all else moved
 in orbit around this one centre until
 the political design aligns with sense of art;
 all now is negritude and being one
 in race with Africa, with all the islands, with America –
 that only is his means for forging conscience, and for song.

Kincaid too. Sick, and pained to art,
 in *Annie John*: the utter hardening of her heart
 against her mother and against the intimate past,
 the construction and the final shape of her events
 formed and measured to the models of Lamming and of Joyce.
 But here again a divagation from the source:
 not refusal of obedience for the sake of art –
 or not that only. Not a sudden break
 or slow drift from the vocation of religious life,
 not tense uncertainty which strangulates devotion.
 And not mass struggle with landlord and with factory.
 Instead a girlwoman's outgrowing of the common ways,
 experience speaking, in daily acts, a dialect
 unknown to mother or to mother's mother, dialect
 they decry, to make what was unsaid by them remain
 unsaid – while she is moved to touch and salty,
 soft taste with another of her form and place.
 What all desired for her, she did not;

instead a Red Girl's cruel pinch,
then tears and warm, gluey girllips
caressing the offended spot. Or Gweneth Joseph
for whom she would abandon every aspect and relation,
excepting this one ecstasy of injury and balm.
His arm, Cranly's arm. Wilde's
love that dare not speak its name.
In Joyce, hints only – twist of recognition,
model of her life at once forming and re-formed.

She too, in the end, went down to the ships,
to eat salt bread in a foreign land.
Before descent, she sought out Gwen –
entangled in the net of family: engaged to wed;
estrangement more total than Stephen from Cranly.
Annie feels the vertigo of dissolution at the base,
the plummeting of Icarus or Satan into a wasteful deep.
A different ending still, not Joyce nor Lamming,
uncertain both of high art and of revolution,
her face a grimace forced against expected sentiment;
then the cradle of a sea-cabin, or the bier,
and she, a fallen vessel, 'slowly emptying out'.

For each, perhaps, the sense is typical, all
sharing in the common lot: the vacancy of hope,
the loss of home and home's imagination,
even the concrete act of boarding ships.
But not the speaking of that commonality,
the public voice to say the isolated place,
to bound with words the small space of hurt
in which each lives, forgetful of the rest,
and map it onto shared geography.
To fashion shapes of speech into memorial is rare,
and rarer still the social testament
that re-forms, and thus assuages, pain to beauty.
For most, there is no voice,
and no defining name. The memory remains
severed from the speaking part. Like Philomel.

DANNY MORRISON

Dear Future

There will be red, then there will be black – Fred D'Aguiar

The bodies have been buried. There was no retaliation. The soldiers have been withdrawn from the streets of Belfast but on every corner the ghosts of the dead remain stranded until their features fade with memory.

The odd British army helicopter, of course, still carries out surveillance. The border is still patrolled. Some militants, stranded with the ghosts of comrades, embittered or hurt too much, still imagine circumstances where the old struggle can be replicated. Some unionists, bitter, intransigent, also hurt, recalling their dead, still indulge in the dream of stopping the clock, or better still, turning it back.

It is October the 1st, 1998, and today the Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams has had his third meeting with the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble. This is progress. Even if they haven't agreed. They were attempting to sort out the issue of decommissioning of IRA weapons – the very contentious issue over which the first phase of the peace process and the first IRA ceasefire back in 1994 broke down. Trimble, now the First Minister in the new northern Assembly as a result of the extraordinary political developments this year, is refusing to form a multiparty executive which includes Sinn Fein or set-up cross-border executive bodies until the IRA agrees a timetable and verification process. No such requirement from Sinn Fein – other than a pledge to use its influence to bring decommissioning about – is in the Belfast Agreement signed on Good Friday. In fact, Trimble lost that argument of linkage back then. But it is the latest crisis and it has the potential to once again de-rail all the progress to date. But let us go back. Let us see how we arrived at this point. What sort of a year has it been. Has peace won the war?

British army helicopters have been in the sky above Belfast almost continuously since 1971 when the IRA launched its armed struggle; apart from Christmases, that is, when the combatants like civilized beings observed unofficial ceasefires. In mid-July 1998 the helicopters were, unusually, not above the skies of republican districts in Belfast looking out for possible dissident IRA activity but were monitoring working-class unionist areas for gangs of loyalists roaming the streets, setting up illegal roadblocks, rioting and hijacking vehicles. In several towns loyalist

paramilitaries (mostly associated with the Loyalist Volunteer Force, the LVF) were throwing grenades at, and opening fire on, their *allies* – members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (the RUC), 90% of whom are from the Protestant community, and on British soldiers. In the same period ten rural Catholic churches and several schools were destroyed in arson attacks, and Catholic families were petrol-bombed from their homes in mixed areas. It was all so reminiscent – the past as our future.

The immediate cause of the trouble was the decision of the Parades Commission to ban Orangemen from marching from Drumcree Church of Ireland graveyard through Garvaghy Road, the Catholic quarter of Portadown, a town 40 miles outside of Belfast. Annually, the Orangemen celebrate the victory of the Dutch William of Orange over the Catholic heir to the English throne, James II, in 1690, fought on Irish soil. The indigenous Irish supported James: the English and Scottish settlers of the Ulster Plantation supported William. As a result of the ban several thousand Orangemen camped on the hillside at Drumcree, determined that they would get their way.

The Parades Commission was established in law by the British government to independently adjudicate on the controversial marching issue after the unrest in 1997. The British government had banned certain marches in the past but then disgracefully reversed its decisions when loyalists threatened and used widespread violence, including assassinating innocent Catholics. Nationalists were then batoned off their own streets to allow the Orangemen to march, leaving nationalists angry at being treated as second-class citizens, almost 30 years after the founding of the civil rights movement.

The difference between 1997 and 1998 is that last May people in both parts of Ireland in two referenda voted for the Belfast Agreement, an agreement which was negotiated by *most* of the political parties over a period of months and signed on Good Friday. The votes in the North (the Six Counties) was 70% in favour. For the first time in 75 years Sinn Féin, which is associated with the IRA, took part in the negotiations, their inclusion having been secured by the renewal of the IRAs ceasefire in July 1997.

The main points of the Agreement were: the establishment of an elected Assembly in the North with a power-sharing Executive representative of both communities, and the emplacement of cross-border and all-Ireland bodies to deal with social and economic matters; Southern Ireland would relinquish its territorial claim over the North; that the Dublin government and the nationalist community accept that there will be no change in the (British) constitutional status of the North without the consent of a majority (thus giving the unionists the assurances they have been requiring); that political prisoners belonging to those organizations observing ceasefires would be released within two years; and that both communities would be recognized as having equal rights.

The Agreement also says that the Assembly and the Executive can only

function if they enjoy the support of a majority in both communities. Furthermore, they can only function if the all-Ireland and cross-border bodies (their third tier) that deal with social and economic matters are also facilitated and supported by the Assembly. While Sinn Féin places great store in these bodies the unionists, from Trimble to Paisley, have major problems with their all-Ireland nature, and have expressed fears that these are the first step to a united Ireland.

A close examination of the referendum vote in the North and the share of the seats in June Assembly elections reveals that unionists are split virtually down the middle over the Agreement. In the referendum the unionist community voted 31.12% Yes. But 28.88% of them voted No, against the recommendation of the leader of the mainstream Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, who is by no means noted for his moderation. In fact, Trimble became party leader in 1995 for being identified with the Orange victory at that years Drumcree when the British government capitulated to their demands to march through Garvaghy Road. In June, just over 30 pro-Agreement unionists were elected, including two from loyalist paramilitary parties on ceasefire, as opposed to 25 anti-Agreement candidates under a coalition led by the old man of sectarian politics, the fundamentalist preacher, Ian Paisley.

The siege at Drumcree in 1998 was being used by Paisley and the Orange Order to try and subvert the Agreement and undermine Trimble. Paisley said, This is a battle that has to be won. No ifs. No buts. For nationalists it had become a litmus test of whether the Agreement and the new dispensation could deliver them from the sectarian triumphalism which has been a hallmark of the Six-County state since its inception. If nationalists are no longer second-class citizens then the Orangemen require *their* consent to march through *their* district just as, in the bigger picture, nationalists accept that there will not be a British withdrawal and a re-united Ireland without the consent of the unionists.

In Portadown the Orange Order refused to negotiate with the Catholic residents for two reasons. One, they insisted that they have a *traditional* right to march, regardless of the changed demographics of the now 100% nationalist area (over the years many of the Catholic families living here came as refugees, having been driven from homes in mixed areas). And, two, because the elected spokesperson for the residents, Councillor Brendan McKenna, is a former republican prisoner. This refusal to negotiate mirrored exactly the position also of David Trimble who until September refused to recognize Gerry Adams party, Sinn Féin, despite an IRA ceasefire, Sinn Féin signing the Belfast Agreement, and the party having 18 members elected to the 108-seat Assembly.

To take its seats in the Assembly Sinn Féin took the radical step of ending the partys 70-year-old policy of abstentionism, leading to accusations from a small number of dissident republicans, some of whom had split from the IRA, that Sinn Féin had sold out traditional republican principles. These

dissidents called themselves the Real IRA. They were formed after a secret IRA Convention in October 1997 (specially called at the behest of the critics of the peace process) at which they were defeated by a majority of delegates who opted to support the leaderships direction and keep the guns quiet. This minority split away and by mid-1998 they were car-bombing small towns throughout the North, mostly from bases in the South. Sinn Fein countered their criticisms by stating that its approach was in fact the more revolutionary one and reflected an increasing confidence among the nationalist community which makes up 40% of the population in the North.

The Assembly held its first meeting on July 1st and elected David Trimble as First Minister and as his deputy, Seamus Mallon of the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party, the SDLP (which got six seats more than Sinn Fein). Sinn Feins strength entitles it to two seats on the Executive but before the make-up of the Executive was decided the Assembly went into recess, just before the Drumcree siege.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, 12 July, loyalists petrol-bombed the working-class home of 29-year-old Christine Quinn, a Catholic, in Ballymoney, a town about 30 miles north of Belfast. Her three children, Richard (11), Mark (10) and Jason (9) were burned to death. There was immediate public revulsion but still the Orangemen at Drumcree refused to call a halt to their siege of Garvaghy Road, and even tried to rumour that the deaths were carried out by a relative of Chrissie Quinn and had nothing to do with them. Their spokesperson, David Jones, then claimed that the RUC had put some loyalists up to carrying out the petrol-bombing in order to discredit the siege!

That Sunday afternoon a chaplain for the Orange Order, the Reverend William Bingham, declared from the pulpit of his church that a fifteen minute walk down Garvaghy Road would be a very hollow victory because it would be in the shadow of three coffins. He said that Orangemen should go home. Across the world the Orangemen were condemned. Even newspapers in Britain normally sympathetic to their cause began to question the cost of the Union and whether it was worth it. On Monday the Belfast nationalist paper, the Irish News, caught the forlorn mood of the times. On its front page, under the photographs of the children, it reproduced Rückert's poem *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children):

In this weather, in this storm,
I would never have sent the children out;
Someone took them out,
I could have no say in it.

In this weather, in this turmoil,
I would never have let the children go out;
I would have been afraid they might be hurt,
Now these are idle thoughts.

In this weather, in this horror,
I would never have let the children go out,
I was worried they might die the next day,
That is now not a thing to worry about.

In this weather, in this storm,
I would never have send the children out;
Someone took them out,
I could have no say in it.

In this weather, in this turmoil, in this storm,
They rest as if in their mothers house,
Not frightened by any storm,
Protected by the hand of God.

Though sporadic violence continued for another two nights the numbers on the hillside decreased. At some parades on the following Monday Orangemen openly shouted disagreements at each other, with the Reverend William Bingham being physically attacked and thrown into a ditch. The Orange Order was in disarray. The RUC and British army occupied the hillside, made arrests and recovered weapons and explosive devices, and effectively ended the occupation.

The immediate political fall-out of the deaths of the three children was to cause a lot of soul-searching among Orangemen and unionists, and appeared to strengthen the hand of supporters of the Agreement, and, in particular, strengthen the leadership of David Trimble against extremists from within his own party and without. One week before the burning to death of the children, the Orangemen at Drumcree had planned to muster 100,000 people on that hillside to force the British government to capitulate. A few days later the fields were empty and it seemed that we had all been given another chance.

Then came Omagh.

At ten past three, on Saturday, 15th August, a car bomb exploded in the main street of Omagh (70 miles from Belfast), killing 29 men, women and children and severely injuring scores of others. It was the worse single incident in the Troubles. It was an act of violence so beyond-the-rules of any conceivable perception of legitimate engagement, and so out of tune with the desire of the Irish nation for peace, that Gerry Adams condemned it without reservation. Up until Omagh Sinn Fein representatives had steadfastly refused to use the word condemn, not only because of its association with the hypocritical double-standards of unionist and British politicians who refuse to condemn British violence, but because Sinn Fein had viewed armed struggle as a legitimate response to the British presence and to British interference. Sinn Fein was now signalling the primacy of politics over armed struggle and, indeed, a few weeks later Gerry Adams intimated that the war was over when he said that violence must now be a thing of the past, over, done with, gone.

So outraged by Omagh was the public and so intense was public pressure on the anything but Real IRA that within a week it called a total ceasefire. London and Dublin had reacted swiftly with amendments to the emergency laws making conviction on membership charges easier to obtain (a draconian measure, actually in breach of the spirit of the Belfast Agreement). Furthermore, the dissident republicans frantically contacted the media to claim that they had been threatened by the Provisional IRA (that is, the *real* IRA) that they would be dealt with if they didn't ceasefire. Shortly afterwards, the LVF and the Irish National Liberation Army also declared ceasefires, leaving the ineffectual Continuity IRA (associated with Republican Sinn Féin which split from Sinn Féin in 1986) the only group not on ceasefire.

One would have thought that circumstances could not have been more propitious for political progress. But then, in September, David Trimble, created a full-scale crisis when he once again placed all emphasis on IRA decommissioning, or, in its absence, that Sinn Féin not be allowed to sit on the future Executive. Certainly, Trimble remains under pressure from his own party dissidents. And the Orange Order and Paisley continually accuse him of being prepared to sit with Sinn Féin in government while the IRA holds on to its arsenal of explosives and guns (which it shipped from Libya in the late eighties).

There is no doubt that the IRA inflicted heavy suffering on the unionist community and that unionist anger is genuine. On the issue of prison releases the unionist parties and much of the media have tended to concentrate on IRA prisoners and the anger and dismay their release will cause to the relatives of those whose loved ones were killed. What is completely ignored, of course, is that in the case of over four hundred nationalist families in the North they will never even be in the position to experience such anger and dismay because the people who killed their loved ones – these people being members of the RUC and British army – never served a day in prison in the first place, and they have been and still are protected by those politicians shouting loudest. Another fear opponents of the process have raised is the prospect of all these prisoners rejoining an intact, heavily armed IRA. But over thirty years, even when the jails were full, there was never a time when the IRA failed to recruit. The unionists either cannot see or choose not to see that the IRA has a will to peace.

Back in the 1960s the IRA split and the Provisional IRA was formed partly because its leadership had decommissioned the majority of the organizations weapons, leaving the nationalist community virtually undefended when the pogroms of August 1969 were unleashed by unionist supporters helped by considerable numbers of RUC men, and Catholics were burned out of their homes, their churches and schools destroyed. IRA decommissioning, in republican eyes, is synonymous with surrendering, yet as far as the IRA is concerned it may not have won the war but it certainly did not lose it either.

Perhaps the only circumstances in which the IRA might decommission are

those where certain conditions prevail. There would need to be institutions in place in which nationalists had confidence. A new police service – not the RUC – representative of both communities would need to be established. And, finally, nationalists would have to feel secure and free from the types of sectarian attacks to which they have been subjected, not just this year, but throughout the history of the Northern Ireland state.

At the time of writing, in addition to the row over decommissioning, no Executive has been formed, and the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists cannot agree which areas should come under the authority of the cross-border bodies.

Saturday, August 22nd, in Belfast was sunny but unseasonably chilly – weather consistent with one of the worse summers we ever had, though summer had started out promising, as promising as the political climate which saw the historic breakthrough in the talks, the Agreement, and popular support for the Referenda. On that day I walked to St Peters Pro-Cathedral to take part in a Vigil of Prayer, like thousands of others across Ireland, in memory of the Omagh victims: an eighteen-month-old baby, a twenty-month-old baby, an eight-year-old girl, a twelve-year-old boy, two Spanish teenagers, a sixty-five-year-old woman... A candle was lit for each person, and two roses were laid for the unborn infants of Mrs Avril Monaghan, eight-months pregnant, whose daughter and mother also died.

I thought to myself: the days of intransigence, the days of bombast, the days of bombing are over. But it is shameful that we shall live on the backs of the dead. Not just one killed, not just three, not just four, but an unconscionable toll... Hopefully, it will all look slightly different through the prism of time, and there will come a time when there will not be red, when there will not be black, the colours of blood and despair, but there will be blue, the blue skies of peace.

Dear Future...



Illustration: Jeanne Jeffares

A.K. Whitehead

REFLECTIONS ON SOME ECCLESIAL ASPECTS OF LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY CATHOLICISM

It's because God is doing a new thing in the church
that priests are scared as candles in a breeze.
For years they kept the Holy Spirit boxed up in a Sacrament
with the lid locked on lapses of liturgies and canons
with a perspex side for viewing.
He was not allowed to move.
But now he's out!
With power!!
Power!!!
Power to the plebs who never had any.
Power to the inert
who were left to sit and twiddle.
Power to the multitude.
Power to the kids who've been left a kingdom.

The priests are scared as incense in a thurible.
The Spirit's out
and winding all the clockwork dolls.
The serfs are moving.
Moving.
Moving in the power of the Spirit.
They can hardly move except to speak in tongues,
(not Latin)
or heal or prophesy or work a miracle or two
or preach and teach or discern a few
evil spirits – the priests can't script for that!

The priests are scared as vestments in a washer.
The Father used to be a fuzzy-faced old man
in faded paintings from the past.
Now he's Abba.
Jesus used to be just someone's name.
Now he's someone with just a name.
The Holy Spirit used to be abstraction.
Now the people know him as the one
standing at their side.

The priests are scared as ostriches at feather farms.
 The people are no longer sat.
 They're jumping up

and down

hands in the air.

They are not scripted.

They are not choreographed.

They are spontaneous

pre

and un

table

dic

like the wind that whips the wrappers
 over wastelands,
 the wrappers from used boxes,
 empty boxes,
 discarded.

The priests are scared as lovers in a quarrel.
 Scared to lose the love and adulation
 of those like themselves.
 Scared of those with blazing hearts
 dropping on the parish like incendiaries.

Fire!

Blown by Wind of Transformation,
 transfiguring,
 scaringly
 and invigoratingly new.

Not destructive:
 new and renewing.



Illustration: Jeanne Jeffares

Martin Bennett

IN LAGOS HARBOUR

Coolly down the Marina strolls the breeze,
A musky courtesan on a flying visit
From Brazil. Pawpaws and palmtrees sigh,
The ships so ornamental out there
Against the gold-strewn blue, O rare moments
Of between when thoughts drunkenly forget
Who own them now bustling noon mellows
Toward evening and at ten kobo a trip
The rusty green ferry to Apapa
(Manufactured by John Brown, Glasgow)
Hoots thrice in the name of leisure.

Tincans, orange peel, used condoms, oilslicks
Drift upon the roadstead's swell to ensure
Things don't get too tidy or romantic.
With the strange muscularity of change
Both shorelines bristle, near and distant future
Heralded by cranes' colossal elbows –
Outside the Post Office a cast-bronze
Shango, Yoruba god of lightning
And now of telecommunications,
Fist clenching a thunderbolt bouquet,
At his back the go-slow's new-fangled roar.

ROADSIDE REFLECTION

Former cynosure of ministries,
His image so exorbitantly posed for
And printed with public funds
Lies soiled and torn

At the roadside, litter
For history's dustbin, one more leaf
Rusted by the feet
Of children, a swerving car.

In some obscure prison-cell
The man stripped to himself lives
On, envying the warder
The freedom of his poverty.



John Mateer

THE GUIDE

He tells them, 'My name is Milton.'
He drives the landrover like a tank.
He watches the rhino with the eyes
of a lover and the elephant with the eyes
of a husband. The poachers set snares.
He collects them. The tourists take photos.
He allows them. His bosses speak siSwati.
He could mock them. It wasn't he who spoke
the poem of 'grass that grows for sharp teeth
and rivers that flow for us all.' It was he
who stopped the landrover at the dam's edge
and asked the foreigners to look for the python.
It was there he told them, 'They are always basking here,
That is why the grass is sleeping.'

MY MOTHER'S MEMORY

What do they know about the life you lived,
about your friend Juanita with her father from Madeira
and her mother the Kaapie and her pet sheep?
What do they know about your Dad who installed
the first lightbulb in Grahamstown, whose Cockney
songs were as innocent and cheeky as his feeding
dagga to the donkey curling its hair? And what
about his parents and their being a buffer between the Xhosa
and the Dutch, Londoners on the banks of the Fish River?
And what about your Mom, born to a lady from
Tristan da Cunha, reading books on the Royal Family, sitting under
an olden day painting of sinister angels? What can they know
about your uncles who never married? Can they feel the fish that's
used to spank the woman? The banknotes fluttering down
over your heads after months in the desert? Or taste the best
bread in the world baked in vacated anthills by dedicated
Zouth-West-Afrikan tannies who're as reassuring as dawn? Ag,
if only they could imagine you running around pushing a barrow
with the effigy, all screeching, 'Guy het nie hare nie!
Guy het nie hare nie!' If they could only imagine your sister going out
with a Russian spy, or the hawker describing, in his lekker
Cape Malay English, his pink satin waistcoat and yellow umbrella
ready for the Coon Carnival. Even I hear the flowersellers
on the Parade only as an echo and those Limey sailors who
took you and your friend to the Bops only as dummies on a warship.
Maybe what I'm saying is that all life is like your mother
with an eyepatch appearing in a costume of her forebears
and your father's falling asleep in a field and waking
to walk home the wrong way? Maybe the horse your brother
nursed through colic and the mud wall that collapsed
in the Mowbray house and the Italian alpine bells ringing your name
and the country of your destination are all the same, must be forgotten?

SHAUN LEVIN

A Year of Two Summers

It was a good place to come from in that it was a good place to leave.

Robert Mapplethorpe

I

1978 was a year of two summers. A summer of departure and a summer of arrival.

I spent the first summer at Habonim camp in a green canvas tent on a site marked by hammocks and benches made by Joburg boys. Big-city boys who weren't afraid to be caught smoking in their tents after lights-out. Boys proud to stand before the mirror at dawn with shaving-cream on their cheeks. In their shiny Adidas shorts and naked backs. Boys who had their own versions to the songs we sang and they shouted them out in competition.

At the start of the second summer the employment agency sent us to pick carobs in chilled before-sunrise humidity and I had no idea where I was. They drove us out to the carob groves on the open back of a truck. I remember Nestor's chest and small brown nipples when we sat down for lunch. His thighs as thick as entire bodies, covered in hair blonded by an Argentinian sun. We sawed off dead branches and dragged them across the dew-wet ground to the open trucks, until the calluses began to bleed and then seal up and harden. By then it was time to start school again.

During the first summer questions were shrugged aside and phone-calls glided from talk to hush to.

'There's nothing to say. Nothing is final yet.'

And I, unable to keep the news to myself, let everyone know we were about to leave. So proud to be amongst the departing few. Special at last. I wanted my name to be called out at the closing ceremony at summer camp. They ordered those going on *aliyah* to come and stand in a line before everyone. Coming to the centre, my socks got caught in the barbed-wire surrounding the bonfire. And then, once I'd unhooked myself I stood with the other to-be new immigrants, SHALOM inscribed in fire behind us, singing *Hatikvah*. *Kohollodbalevav pe heh ni hih ma*. (It's hard to imagine a time when I didn't know the meaning of those words.)

And the second summer dominated by noise and uncertainty. Along the road from the beach to the Canada House Absorption Centre rows of brown buildings exuding music surprising in its familiarity. Stevie Wonder. He's a real nowhere man. Rod Stewart. I am sailing. I am sailing.

That year I learnt the real words to *Hatikvah*. As long as inside the heart, etc.

By the end of the first summer I had tasted desire in the dryness and numbness on the inside of my mouth. I had swallowed the after-rugby sweat from Christopher's body in the locker-room when Peter said to him: 'Haven't you heard of deodorant, man?' And back in the classroom Budgie caned me for forgetting my Afrikaans textbook at home. *Die Lewende Taal*. I bent over the front desk my eyes seeing only David Walker's who told me I was crying when the T-rule whacked against my backside. Mr Lategan, mouth as puckered as a beak, takes a bunch of *vrot* grapes from his briefcase, holds them up to the class, and reminds us how important it is to eat fresh fruit and bath twice a day. Healthy living.

At home they said to me: Say goodbye to Grace, and I shook her hand, soft, almost melting. Almost white from washing dishes: Bye, Grace. She stood at the top of the stairs, arms folded over her chest, and I cannot conjure up a memory of her eyes. I need to know now: Did she cry to see me go. (When I think Grace might be dead now I stop myself from imagining any journey back home.) 'Bye-bye, *baas*.' Bye-bye. My father turned to her (their day of birth only four days apart): 'Now, Gracie, don't forget to scrub the walls before the new *baas* moves in.'

'Yes, *baas*,' she says.

Where were they taking me?

And by the end of the second summer I had tasted the sweetness of carob and fresh *halva*, and turned my eyes from what they saw. In San Francisco Steve's apartment on the eighth floor of the absorption centre, Jean-Paul from Morocco taught us to dance like John Travolta.

Le fièvre de samedi soir. Night fever, night fever.

There was the summer when milk came in bottles to your doorstep and you could press your thumb into the aluminium top and lick cream from its underside. Put your ear to the bowl and hear the milk snap, crackle and pop. And the summer when we crossed the dunes and shrubs (not a *veld* anymore, but a desert) to get to the shops for milk in plastic sachets that snuggled into blue plastic jugs. Snip off the corner to pour the milk onto sugarless cornflakes. No more Kellogg's. No more Nestlé. No more liquorice allsorts from Beacon Sweets.

There was the summer of fresh fruit and vegetables off the back of Mr Koopoo's van. And his daughter Amshi who stepped down from the passenger compartment to carry bags of mango and fresh pineapple into the house. Her long hair reaching down to her hips and the golden ring in her nose. Or not. Maybe not even mangoes and pineapples. And then a summer of rows upon rows of vegetables piled on the cement ground at the open market in Migdal (née *Majdal*, before the Palestinians got trucked out to Gaza) and the old woman with the black woollen hat and her bare-footed daughter in a red T-shirt shouting, tomatoes, tomatoes, *agvaniot*, three liras a kilo. Cheap, cheap, *be'zil ha'zol*.

And there was the summer with the thatched-roof house with the white-washed walls in Cape St. Francis. When the mullet ran in shoals like sunlight on water close to the shore and we pumped for blood-worms at low-tide. That summer the hair began to sprout on my inner thighs and I shaved it off with my father's razor. The beach stretched from the mouth of the Krom to the rock pools where the waves funnelled in and washed back out. And surfers in Hawaiian shorts and brown, golden, how-could-there-be-anything-so-beautiful skin. And the summer when the sea was a lake and the blue and white flag said: Come in. Swim as much as you like. There are no waves here. The beach littered with tar and plastic bags and the sound of beach-bats. I shaved my legs that summer and locked myself in the bathroom to do push-ups and masturbate. And the life-savers, dark and hirsute, tight swimming trunks hugging their. Laughing, taunting. Poor little white boy with white white skin. Hey, *kotej*. They yell out: Ow arr yu? Miz Amerika. Big *tzitzi*, hey?

There was the summer when the neighbour was a witch with a loquat tree in her backyard. From the pool in our garden we'd throw soft fruit and loquat pips at her kitchen window. Nobody dared approach the winding stairs to her front door. I'd rather have stolen fire-crackers from the bubble-and-squeak sweet shop than chance her evil spell. And I did. I did steal. On Guy Fawkes Day. David, Michael and Eytan dared me to and I filled my pockets. Like an angel. And the summer when the neighbour was a 19-year old woman from Oklahoma who sucked my cock for hours until I came in her mouth. There was another neighbour, too. A young Indian girl and her family from Bombay. Curry and cumin and cardamom ghosted out of their flat and filled the stairwell up to the eighth floor. Coconut ice-cream on her birthday and a three-layered cake of vanilla sponge perfumed with rose water. And she danced for us. Enchanted, confused, lost new immigrants. Hands turning and winding to twanging music. And she said, she said, they all said she was Jewish. Jewish? You mean like us Jewish or was there some other kind of Jewish, too? No, all the same Jewish. All the same. We're all the same. All of us. Jewish.

But no. Grampa says: They're hewers of wood and drawers of water. Just look in the Bible. Everyone's got his place in this grand enterprise. This kingdom.

Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

I turned thirteen during the first summer. They were both hot and saturated by clouds of humidity, leaving no room for that cold season in between. And I longed for a winter. I yearned for a time in which I'd be able to curl up and keep myself warm. By the fireplace of the first place on the mohair carpet. There was no need for fire in this new place, this second place, it's sun so violent the sky had lost its colour. And then by December, my birthday, the second summer was long over, and the present kept tucking everything under the mirrored surface of memory.

II

It all takes place inside. I take Grace Masakele's hand and we walk through its chambers. Look, Grace, look.

Africa is green. Luscious wet bright green with winds and wide open sunflower fields. Travelling up to the Orange Free State I gaze out the back window at crowds of round black circles in yellow bonnets. Smiling. The car heading northwards as the faces follow us. We're on our way to say goodbye to family. We stop off in Aliwal North, my father's place of birth, and drive around until he says they must have taken down the house he grew up in. It's still cold outside and we swim in the sulphur baths, my father my brother and I, my vaccination for our visit to Lesotho still hurting my shoulder. Later, we sat outside on a bench eating Simba cheese and onion chips.

In Bloemfontein we played with cousins I'd never met before. My newly-found-soon-to-be-lost cousins who took us fishing at the dam and *braaied* what we caught. In the evening we played *tok-tokkie* along the street until a neighbour chased us home with his rifle pointing at us.

'I'll call the *blerry* police, *verstaan? Jou bliksem.*' He talks to our parents, his voice carrying all the way to under the beds. 'Tell your children to *pas op*, hey. This place is full of kaffirs. I'm not taking any chances.'

We visited Auntie Naomi that spring. I went into their bedroom where Uncle Max had reached out his hand to turn off his reading lamp and died of a heart attack.

'Just like that. Gone.'

And then we drove back to Port Elizabeth. Or did we go by train. Could we have flown. The journey home has vanished. Another black hole of memory. Come, fill these holes with stories and imaginings. But they're unfillable. They're empty and waiting. Constantly. And when I want to give them a name I say: Pain. Or: Nothingness.

At home my parents spent their nights packing our house into shipping crates. Towards the end all that remained were beds and some paintings. The paintings would travel with us and the beds would be given to the servants. Grace would take my parents' double bed and a single bed; Johnson would take a single bed from the guest-room. He'd move it to his small room in Uncle Nathan's backyard (being a Rhodesian, Johnson couldn't live in New Brighton, the Xhosa location). Who would Johnson invite to sleep over in his room. Who would follow him while he weeded the lawn on his haunches in his faded blue overall. The tight curls on his brown skin visible through the missing buttons as he fills the bucket with weeds and chases a little boy around the garden with his pruning shears and gardening fork, laughing.

Grace had one or two children. She'd had others, but they'd died over the years.

'Grace just had another baby,' someone would say.

I try to remember: What did she look like when she was pregnant. Again:

Nothingness. But this: She was warm and let me be close to her body. She let me watch and help her cook and do the dishes. She let me eat from her plate with my fingers and put my head on her. On her soft jasmine skin. She let me eat from her *mngqusho* and her *khubu mielies*. She'd listen to me swear, *kunya*, and laugh and say, *ai-yee, baas*, don't let the *masta* hear you.

Over the years I'd hear how Thursday or Mary or Goodenough were getting along, surprised at how similar their lives were to mine. And then they'd be dead. They always died.

'Grace just had another baby.'

Her son Nelson came to our house from time to time. (He died last year.) I'd go to Grace's room behind the kitchen and sit on her bed. A mountain of thick mattresses piled high to keep her safe from the *tokolosh*. The smell of hair-oil and perfume and beef scorched crisp dark brown and sweet creamy coffee in a tin cup. A smell so kind and inviting, holding out its hand and saying: Stay with me.

Nelson didn't move from his mother's room, the air warm and thick with bittersweet vapours, and his mother in the house on her knees scrubbing floors. She didn't want him in the house. She didn't want her son to see her not his mother, but a mother bringing up someone else's children, holding little white babies who'd look into her eyes and think: You're my mother.

'He won't go to school, madam,' Grace told my mother. Nelson refused to wear his school uniform and do his homework. He insisted on running around with those good-for-nothing *tsotsies*.

'She's going to have to do something about him,' my father says. 'He can't sit around here all day. What if the police check up? Didn't we pay for that school uniform and his books?'

'I'm telling you, they're just bloody lazy,' grampa says.

I wanted to take Nelson into the valley across the road where the freight-trains went back and forth between the coal-mines in the Kalahari and the harbour at the foot of the hill. The same valley where Michael and I would go hunting for grass snakes under the rocks.

The last two months of summer were spent in a house with only beds to sleep on, a leather sofa in front of the TV and four paintings. In one, four field-hands crossing a field of stubble with scythes, bearing sheaths of wheat on their shoulders, their brown skin dark against the cornfield and the red and purple brush-strokes of early morning sky. In another, Ndebele blues and greens on the outskirts of the village. A mother and a daughter are seated, leaning against a willow tree on the banks of a river. The daughter rests between her mother's legs. The mother plaits her daughter's hair and looks out across the river, at us. The daughter's eyes are closed, basking in the soothing, tender pull on her skull. The dog lies beside them, asleep in the warm sun.

These two pictures flanking the fireplace. The other two in the dining-room above the big round table where my mother would light *Shabbes* candles and I'd refuse to wear a *yarmulkeh*.

'Must you?' my father would say. 'Put it on. For me.'

And I would. And we'd watch my mother pray over the candles like a little girl playing peek-a-boo, and then listen to my father say *kiddush* over the bread and wine. And my mother would ring the silver bell and Grace would bring in the first course and set the pot of soup on a large coaster on the sideboard that had been padded and boxed and sent off to await for our arrival.

Only a few friends came to see us off at the airport. No need, no need, no need to bother. Next year in Jerusalem. Please God, we'll all be together soon. My father removes his necklace with the big silver Magen David and places it around my uncle's neck. He says: You'll bring it with you to the Promised Land when you come. (Ten years we waited. Ten years we waited for any sign of family.) There were tears and hugging and we'll stay in touch, and you must remember to write. At least once a week. See you soon. Have a good time.

We boarded the plane and my father ordered a whisky.

What now?

The plane begins to move. What was I thinking? How do you think about something you haven't the words for? How can you think about leaving your home when you don't know what it means? How can you think about a new country, a new house, new words, when you have never experienced anything vaguely similar? So you grapple with what you have and translate it into what you see. You gradually stop thinking about the transition. You can't be in two places at the same time. And the feelings that once looked for words begin to change their shape and take on the form of the words that are available.

The runway is speeding below us and the sound of the engine grows louder and more hollow. And then the plane is lifting off the ground, and there's no more noise from the outside. The drone of the engine is swallowed up by the vastness around it. Inside there's just a low hum and a lightness. We'll be there in a matter of hours and soon it will be summer again.

III

Barren land and khaki bushes along the highway. Glaring open spaces of yellow sand and towns made of blocks of flats. At a roadside café, on our way to the south of the country, we stop for food. Food that until then had been exotic. Humous and pitta bread, olives and cucumbers with green chillies pickled in brine. Soon to be our new daily bread. And all the signs and every sound in letters and tongues that were once confined to *shul* and Hebrew classes. This was going to be the summer of difference. A summer when men became beautiful. The summer when envy could barely distinguish itself from desire. The summer when everything would change.

SAEED UR-REHMAN

Decolonizing Post-colonial Theory

This paper seeks to critique the ways in which post-colonial theory, especially as it is produced, consumed and valorized by Western academia, informs and inscribes critical reception and canonization of literary productions from ex-colonized societies. Despite the fact that post-colonial theory is a revisionary project that aims to foreground and recuperate repressed, excommunicated, marginalized and othered epistemes, it does not, and perhaps cannot, mobilize its formations in a completely non-hegemonic mode and, thus, creates its own marginalia. With this statement, I may be running the risk of having an essentialist view about post-colonial theory but I am aware that even anti-essentialism cannot but produce its own essence. Post-colonial theory, as a discursive formation, inevitably hierarchizes some subject positions into 'ideal' post-colonial positions – turning them into the same despotic icons that it seeks to dismantle.

One may argue that post-colonial theory re-appropriates the theoretical terminology of the West but, still, it is impossible to deny that it also constructs a prescriptive model for post-colonial literary and cultural productions as well as for their exegesis. The choice of themes, material and language for post-colonial writers is determined by the discursive formations of post-colonial theory. These discursive formations of post-colonial theory can deny opportunities to writers and artists, from ex-colonized societies, to explore the themes that are not valorized and consumed by the post-colonial theorist. In this way, post-colonial theory creates its own exclusions that exist in ex-colonized societies. Though post-colonial theory may create some opportunities for circulation and consumption of cultural productions from ex-colonized societies, in its very formations one can hear the lamentations of the excluded.

Post-colonial theory, as a field of study in Western academia, has all the characteristics of a hegemonic discourse. The institutionalized and academic patronage of post-coloniality operates as an insidious technology of appropriation because of the material and cultural dominance of the West and post-colonial conditions are homologized in the same way as indigenous peoples were homologized into 'savages' and 'pagans' during the colonial period. Though these homologizations may facilitate theoretical discourses of/about post-coloniality, they also produce an oppressive and prescriptive closure for the cultural productions from post-colonial societies. Post-colonial theory, like other fields of knowledge, operates on some inevitable

exclusions that it cannot enclose. These exclusions do not exist outside post-colonial theoretical discourses but are constructed simultaneously with every enunciation regarding the conditions of ex-colonized societies. For example, the constructed assumption that the major concern of the literatures from erstwhile colonized societies is the resistance to the absent colonizer¹ also produces its own others. Ashis Nandy's remark that 'India is not non-West because non-West is a Western construct' can illustrate the arguments given above.²

The shift from 'Commonwealth Literature' to 'post-colonial literatures' has also failed to remove all the inherent contradictions of the earlier label, because so far the dominant post-colonial texts and their critiques are in the languages of the First World readers and it seems that post-coloniality is best, if not always, expressed in languages that Western theorists can understand. To undermine this cultural hegemony, Ngugi wa Thiong'o decided to give up writing in English altogether³ but even he has to translate himself into English because no First World theorist can be bothered to learn Gikuyu. Ngugi is important to the First World academia as long as he speaks or writes in English, whether original or translated. Moreover, post-colonial theory, while dealing with the colonial and the post-colonial issues also constructs an illusion that colonized societies suffered only when the colonizers were there and, after the departure of the colonizers, their only concern is to write back to the colonial centre. With this constructed preoccupation of ex-colonized societies with the colonial centre, post-colonial theory precludes any amnesiac celebration of the present. As a result post-colonial theory turns the end of territorial colonialism into a source of perpetuation of cultural, academic, theoretical and philosophical colonialism. Therefore, post-colonial theory prescribes and theorizes only that limited/thwarted subversion that it can contain.

For the mobilization of an effective post-colonial emancipatory project, it is important that theoretical discussions of the cultural interactions between the colonizing and the colonized peoples not construct homogenized versions of the West as always oppressing and the East as always oppressed by the West, always struggling against the hegemony of the West and free from indigenous oppressive technologies. In the interaction among different races and cultures, the West is not the only source of repression and there are other pre-colonial and post-colonial social realities that may have nothing to do with Western hegemony. What post-colonial theory does not foreground is the fact that oppression does not begin and end with the arrival and departure of colonizers and that caste system, religious and bureaucratic authorities and economic exploitation of the native by the native can be more vicious than colonialism. It is possible to struggle against the colonizers and make them leave the country (as happened in India) but it is more difficult to fight against the native forms of oppression and it is more painful to be marginalized by one's own fellow beings.

The Eurocentric discussions of syncreticity, hybridity and the arrival of

other cultures into the First World classroom acquires an obscene (post) capitalistic form of consumption of the exotic. The indigenous realities, knowledges and cultures remain marginalized when Western episteme is considered competent enough to deal with all the issues of other cultures. For Western academia, post-colonial theory makes the cultural productions of other cultures more and more docile and 'theorizable'. Through its patronage of other cultures with post-colonial theory, the Western academy not only maintains and perpetuates a Eurocentric world-view but also 'Europomorphizes' other cultures by assigning them familiar philosophical labels and terms. The exotic other that once invited territorial/physical exploration now invites as well as justifies theoretical exploration. With post-colonial theory, Western academia turns the past territorial exploitation of the corpus of the other into a continuing theoretical exploitation. It seems as if colonial history is repeating itself but now with the prefix 'post' to penetrate another realm – the most abstract immaterial recesses of the other.

Western discursive representations of post-colonial literatures tend to operate without considering the stark economic and social realities and, in this way, this celebration of a radical alterity continues the hegemony of Western culture. Because Western theories such as post-structuralism and post-modernism inform the enunciations of post-colonial theory, the dominant culture remains the discoverer of the greatness of its others. The fact that the presence of colonies was itself a decentralizing force that paved the way for the development of the post-structuralist/post-modernist theories that question the notion of a fixed cultural centre remains repressed. The arrival of post-colonial theory as a dominant discourse in Western academia may provide a better market for the cultural productions of the ex-colonial societies but it does not mean that it can generate any symmetrical relations of power between the East and the West. Post-colonial theory does not and cannot promise any extra-discursive space for the Other. This paradox of post-coloniality originates from the site where post-colonial theory has gained dominance.

Because post-colonial discourses have their origins in First World academia – as colonial discourses originated in the West – the critical reception of cultural productions from ex-colonized societies remains mediated, authorized, monitored and contained by the West. The reception of the writing from the so-called 'post-colonial' countries depends on the Western models of literary excellence and/or a narcissistic view of radicalism of a work as it relates to (neo)colonialism. Even in this context, radicalism is often measured in terms of an oppositional model of national identity founded in ideas of the nation adopted from Western models. A 'true' post-colonial perspective on literature has not yet been, and may never be, achieved because the Western episteme remains the dominant episteme. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, if Indians had colonized the West, they would have dismissed:

Shakespeare as a drunken barbarian of considerable genius with an epileptic imagination, the whole drama of Greece and Spain and England as a mass of bad ethics and violent horrors ... and French fiction as a tainted and immoral thing.⁴

These lines make it clear how material and cultural dominance can affect the reception of supposedly autotelic or ahistorical cultural productions. If I may usurp the luxury of being an essentialist, Aurobindo hints at the true post-colonial perspective which will never be achieved by the current modes of post-colonial theorization in Western academia with all its vested interests. Because the on-going cultural hegemony of the West is still a social reality in so many post-colonial or ex-colonized societies, to attain a real post-colonial cultural condition, all of the ex-colonized countries should colonize their respective colonial centres and then produce theoretical treatises about the colonized. With the present modes of circulation of post-colonial theory, the historical traces of the cultural and material hegemony of the West do not disappear completely and keep playing a very important role in the production and reception of cultural and literary texts.

The theories of the ambivalence of colonial discourse only show that the oppressive beginning of the colonial discourse produces its own slippage and deferral through the production of a figure of mimicry in the introduction of English education: 'The *menace* of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.'⁵ What about the slippage, deferral and ambivalences of post-colonial discourse? Once mobilized, post-colonial discourse, like colonial discourse, cannot contain its slippage that is inherent in its origins in Western academia, though often repressed and excluded under the guise of a monolithic narrative of grand unfolding of ex-colonized civilizations.

In India, for example, the novels of Fielding, Brontë and Jane Austen provided the indigenous writers with the idea of the love match that led to the novels dealing with the themes of love and thus constructed an alternative emotional and societal ethos in contrast to the dominant practice of arranged marriages. The first novel of Chandra Chatterji, *Rajmohan's Wife*, tells the story of a woman who falls in love with the brother of her husband and that love wins after many upheavals. Rabindranath Tagore also provided a comparison/contrast between love and arranged marriage in his novel *The Wreck*.⁶ These narratives mark the beginning of a change in the themes of regional literatures and the dominant Brahminic ideals that faced the challenges of Western bourgeois ideals of liberty and individual freedom and progress.

Moreover, despite the celebratory attitude of Western academia towards cultural productions of ex-colonized countries, criticism of Indian English literature within India is still dealing with the problem of the 'Indianness' of Indian English literature and what this Indianness stands for. Oliver Perry in his book *Absent Authority: Issues in Contemporary Indian English Criticism* quotes some sentences from a personal letter that C. D. Narasimhaiah, one

of the most towering figures in Indian English criticism, wrote to him: 'I have some strong prejudices against Indian English poetry which ... is largely metropolitan in its content and expression' and the poets are not 'grounded in their native culture' or 'nourished by it'.⁷ Such a statement from Narasimhaiah who is one of the most prominent critics of Indian English literature and the editor of a very reputable journal called *The Literary Criterion* betrays how the concept of 'Indianness' can exclude the writings that describe contemporary and urban experiences of Indian society. Though revivification of pre-colonial national and indigenous reality was an important step by the pioneers of Indian English literature, the continuous rejection of metropolitan and urban Indian reality by many Indian critics has hampered the discussion of contemporary theoretical problems in Indian English criticism and 'criticism by Indians and others has dealt repeatedly with the three major English novelists – R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao – whose work spans decades before and after independence'.⁸

This process of canonization that operates on the basis of an essentialist idea of 'Indianness' still reflects how deeply the British education system has affected the process of cultural productions. Though the curriculum of English literary study during the colonial period was not based on any concept of 'Englishness' as such but spoke of civilization, tradition and a 'high' culture with texts of Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth and later the productions of national and nationalist literatures both attempted to emulate and surpass the standards of Western literature. This strategy was effective as far as creation of a counter-discourse was concerned but after the independence of India, turned into a domination of elitist aesthetics that were coterminous with the concept of 'Indianness.'

The original negation of urban experiences, because the city was considered a Westernized space, has proved to be the rut in which indigenous criticism of Indian Writing in English seems to have been caught. The theoretical position that provided the space to launch a counter-discourse has become the site of a nostalgia that rejects contemporary forms of expression as essentially non-Indian. This state of indigenous criticism is not different from imperial criticism of Indian English Literature in its attitude towards Indian English literature.

In India, the writers who choose to write in English are considered to be elitists/outsideers by the critics who employ regional languages of India because of Indian English's 'historical origins in pre-Independence British English and multiple and divisive forms and functions at that time'.⁹ Moreover, many critics still employ the traditional British models of criticism and look for some 'universal' values in Indian English literature. And if traditional British values and standards of judging literature remind them of the colonial history of India, the critics employ the ancient Sanskrit *rasa-dhavan*i principles of judging a work of art.

Ashcroft et al. suggest that this conflict between indigenous and foreign

theories of criticism is basically a problem related to the project of decolonization.¹⁰ Privileging some indigenous critical theory is an important strategy for asserting the specificity of a cultural tradition and preventing it from being incorporated into a neo-colonialist Western aesthetic, but it can also function as a limiting strategy when it fails to include Indian urban or metropolitan experiences in an aesthetic framework. Whereas the traditional indigenous literary criticism of India has also proved resilient against the neo-universalism of post-modernism which foregrounds the play of endless deferral and attempts to pre-empt indigeneity as an apolitical and non-radical form of identity, the same traditional aesthetic has often abrogated the hegemony of Western modernity. Paranjape, an Indian critic, rejects Homi Bhabha and Spivak because:

Their stake in India and the health of our academic culture ... is minimal. They speak to the West, seek to modify Western modes of thinking and writing. If they had a real stake in India, they would publish in India, ensure that their work is readily available here. But I am yet to find a single essay by either of them in an Indian periodical.¹¹

These objections against Bhabha and Spivak effectively hint at the immanent politics of publishing, marketing, circulation and consumption of critical texts within Western academia.

On the other hand, if essentialist and nativist theories are not employed, then a lack of understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of alterity appears and the critics start applying Western critical theories without caring for the cultural relevance of these theories. At a 'global' level or in First World academia, where post-colonial theory and literatures are the latest buzz-words in the fields of literature and cultural studies, there are different models and circuits of interpretations and reception of a so-called 'Third World' text. Fredric Jameson in his article 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' has asked for a different approach to Third World texts because these texts are basically allegories of the nation.¹² Jameson's prescriptive strategies are based on a Eurocentric model of cultural productions and the Western history operates as a self-justified 'given' behind this recommendation and 'his conceptualisation of the Third World nation's identity is shaped by economic and cultural models that are western'.¹³

In JanMohamed and Parry's model of post-colonial reality, the world remains a bifurcated and polarized reality with its manichean dichotomies between black and white, the colonized and the colonizer, exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. For them, there are no in-between spaces, no thirdnesses and no hybridity other than impurity and critical *naïveté*. For Homi Bhabha, assertions of ethnicity and cultural identity betray a lack of contingency and ignorance of ruptures, and universally shifting subject positions have become the privileged way to reach a cultural and ethnic utopia. Ania Loomba has pointed out the problems with

Bhabha's theory of hybridity and how this hybridity is enunciated in his writings. One of the problems that Loomba has discussed is that Bhabha tries to jump from 'a particular act of enunciation to a theory of all utterance'¹⁴ by taking one example and making it account for the whole colonial encounter.

Similarly Loomba has pointed out how Spivak's theory of a silent subaltern subject suggests an impossibility of subaltern agency. Though Spivak is more aware of her position as a post-colonial critic and theorist than Bhabha, both of them have not produced theories that can take into account ways of recovering, negotiating and enunciating one's identity and agency. Spivak's work has resulted in an assertion of theoretical impossibility of subalterns' voice and denial of a 'nostalgic, revisionist recovery' of subjectivity.¹⁵ Loomba has pointed out in her article that some 'alternative ways of being and seeing' must be recognized and welcomed if we have to preventing the subaltern from being 'theorized into silence':

The choice between stark oppositions of coloniser and colonised societies, on the one hand, and notions of hybridity that leave little room for resistance outside that allowed by the colonising power on the other, between romanticising subaltern resistance or effacing it, is not particularly fertile.¹⁶

Another model of post-colonial literatures which is not an original contribution to the field but rather operates on an eclectic combination of different theories and now has acquired almost a neo-colonial canonical importance is given by Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back*. It not only speaks on behalf of all the post-colonial subjects but also celebrates their arrival in the global academic and critical discourses. What was once a colonial centre now becomes a post-colonial centre when all the nations, which were once part of the Empire, are now writing back to the centre. The cultural hegemony of the centre is taken for granted because 'the nexus of power involving literature, language, and a dominant British culture has strongly resisted attempts to dismantle it'.¹⁷ This homogenization of all post-colonial literatures constructs a necessity in order to facilitate post-colonial theorization that operates on the binarism of centre and periphery. In this manner, all the post-colonial nations and cultures are homogenized and the presence of neo-colonial hegemony, multinational capital enterprises, mass media are seen to be less powerful and influential than the British culture. The cultural productions that do not fit the criteria of the First World post-colonial theorist because they move away from all centres instead of writing back to the centre, and evince influences other than the colonial legacies of English literary studies or Brahminic aesthetics, are simply ignored.

At the end of the twentieth century, the old colonial centre is not the only source of cultural imperialism and exploitation and the prescriptive nature of post-colonial theory thwarts a complete decolonization. Arun P. Mukherjee has summed up the problems with post-colonial theory:

- (a) The theory claims that the major theme of literatures from postcolonial societies is discursive resistance to the now absent coloniser.
- (b) It unproblematically assumes that the writers who write back to the centre are representing their people of their society authentically.
- (c) The theory downplays the different [*sic* difference] between the settler colonial and those colonised in their home territories, using the term 'colonised' for both of them.¹⁸

Similarly, Harish Trivedi has also given cogently valid arguments about the continuity of the West's hegemony in colonial and post-colonial periods. He argues that post-colonial theory is an attempt to 'whitewash the horrors of colonialism as if they had never been, and a scheme to see the history of a large part of the world as divided into two neat and sanitized compartments, the pre-colonial and the post-colonial'.¹⁹ The major problem with the formation of post-colonial theory is the degree of self-consciousness it attaches to itself, but, like other fields of knowledge, it is not free from its generalizations, homogenizations and celebratory cant. Moreover, as a field of study, post-colonial theory does not operate independently of the economies and institutions that control and regulate fields of knowledge and the vested interests of those who have more power to influence the discursive formations of a field. For example, the patronage that certain writers receive at global level is almost directly proportionate to the size of the publishing house that markets their books and the local and international prizes that these writers receive. Harish Trivedi gives the example of Salman Rushdie who with 'the publication of *Midnight's Children* (or more accurately, with the award to it of the Booker prize) in 1981 ... has remained the foremost, almost emblematic, post-colonial writer'.²⁰

On the other hand, the writers whose books are published by local publishers or local subsidiaries of international publishers have to travel a long trajectory for global recognition, and concomitant Western recognition and canonization. A work that is only available within India because of the vicissitudes of (in)visible gods of consumerism and market-place does not receive that theoretical attention that is available to a metropolitan post-colonial writer. Harish Trivedi has remarked that if asked about three or four works that effectively represent post-coloniality in India, he would name two Hindi novels, *Maila Anchal* (1954) by Phanishwarnath Renu and *Raag Darbari* (1969) by Shrilal Shukla, 'fictional-satirical sketches' by Harishankar Parsai and the six volumes of poetry of Raghuvir Sahay;²¹ but because no First World post-colonial theorist has recognized and/or theorized the post-colonial potential of these works, these works and their creators have not been granted an entry in the dominant post-colonial discourse. Trivedi's statement asks us to re-think the relationship between Indian literature and post-colonial theory.

Discursive formation of a field of study, whether colonial or post-colonial in origin, produces its own exclusions and marginalia. Post-colonial theory,

because of its fixation with the centre and the periphery, does not have the flexibility to speak for all the cultural realities that exist in ex-colonized societies. When post-colonial theory does not always lead to the colonial/post-colonial centre, the post-colonial project will be decolonized.

NOTES

1. Arun P. Mukherjee, 'Postcolonialism: Some Uneasy Conjectures', in *Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, ed. by Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996), p. 15. This is a very scathing critique of the discursive formation of post-colonial theory. See my review of this book in *New Literatures Review*, 32 (1997).
2. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 73.
3. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986). In this book, Ngugi said farewell to creative writing in the English language. Though sometimes accused of essentializing pre-colonial African identity, Ngugi's writing is always an uplifting experience for the ones who want to have an identity in the face of the endless post-modern deferral.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Ashram: Pondicherry, 1943), p. 83.
5. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 88.
6. Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Changeling: Indian English Literature: Its Relevance', *The Literary Half-Yearly*, XXX, One (1989), p. 32.
7. John Oliver Perry, *Absent Authority: Issues in Contemporary Indian English Criticism* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1992), p. 16.
8. John Oliver Perry, p. 7.
9. John Oliver Perry, p. 56.
10. W.D. Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 117.
11. Makarand Paranjape, 'Coping with Post-colonialism', in *Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, p. 42.
12. Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (1986), p. 69.
13. Rekha Pappu, 'Determining Nations, Literatures and Theory', in *Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, p. 90.
14. Ania Loomba, 'Overworlding the Third World', in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 309.
15. Ania Loomba, p. 309.
16. Ania Loomba, p. 308.
17. Ashcroft et al., p.4.
18. Arun P. Mukherjee, p. 15.
19. Harish Trivedi, 'India and Post-colonial Discourse', in *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, p. 235.
20. Harish Trivedi, p. 232.
21. Harish Trivedi, pp. 239-240.

Harjit Kaur Khaira

SHE'S LOST THE KNACK BECAUSE THEY STOLE HER BLACK

You say you sigh
The cutting of onions
Has caused the cry
The sadness in your eye.

You say you miss
The melting Indian butter
Which causes the hiss
The heart that tries to wish.

You say you weep
The mixing of saffron
Caught your fingers deep
Now your colour begins to seep.

You say you sing
While you strive to clean
As the West would bring
A slice of new things.

You say you've lost
The sense of smell
The happy riposte
As you measure the cost.

You say you lack
The perfumed voice
Having lost the knack
As they stole your black.

HARJIT KAUR KHAIRA

Post-Colonial Theory: A Discussion of Directions and Tensions with Special Reference to the Work of Frida Kahlo

There are many positions which can be taken within post-colonial theory. The canon of English literature can be re-read from post-colonial perspectives, and subordinate or minority voices from the 'margins' of various imperialisms can be unearthed and amplified. But this body of theory in itself contains dimensions of tension and contradiction. Do post-colonial readers, in focusing upon re-readings of canonical works, merely give the canon a new lease of life? To what extent are re-readings actual reinforcements and perpetuation of such canons? To ask if we continue the project of colonialism through such re-readings is also to raise a question mark over our 'amplification' of marginalized voices. To what extent is our attention given to such voices a complex assimilation and neutralization of the voice of the 'other'? Do we, by accommodating the voices of the 'colonized' in our Western academies, cultural contexts and marketplaces (the post-colonial literature course, the black writing conference held in the predominantly 'white' university, the Spielbergization of *The Color Purple*) merely endorse a new colonialism – what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has seen in the contemporary expansion of the curriculum as merely another phase of 'the neocolonial production of knowledge' which keeps 'a Euroamerican centrism alive'?¹

Such issues link in interesting ways with a question posed by Stuart Hall: 'When was the "post colonial"?' In asking this question it will be the project of this essay to explore some dimensions and tensions in post-colonial theory through the work and figure of Frida Kahlo. Kahlo has been chosen because she and the effects she has had on writing upon cultural issues, can be explored in a range of ways. She can be incorporated into broad artistic movements which stress her similarity to dominant trends, and she can be 'read' and interpreted as an exotic 'addition' to such projects. Kahlo also exists as a colonized artist who must now be liberated by the critical establishment, an icon of a colonized culture whose authentic voice must now be relayed. She also exists as an artist whose work has entered our

culture at the level of the 'symbol'; the distinct 'signature' of her paintings, or of her face and dress as represented in photographs, now has a currency which operates at levels ranging through the colour supplement feature, the advertisement for Mexican holidays and the postcard from the Athena chainstore. Kahlo isn't, of course, the only artist to suffer such a fate, but she remains, for most, an 'exotic' whose history and context remains 'foreign'. The paintings themselves are seductive and exotic in the reception of their 'naivety'; the photographs of her present to Western culture, a beauty that calls to us across a distance – and arguably, this distance remains precisely the gulf between the first and 'third' worlds.

Using theoretical ideas drawn from the works of Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon this essay will attempt to explore the politics of the 'bridge-building' which has sought to close or exploit the gap between Kahlo and the West, while also attempting to read the politics of Kahlo's own work as it confronts the experience of the post-colonial.

The Uses of Kahlo

There is no denying that there are many myths and stories surrounding Frida Kahlo, some of which she cultivated herself. My aim here is to show how some writers have utilized such 'fictions' for diverse, if usually laudable purposes.

In *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* Whitney Chadwick's biographical notes to Kahlo wrongly attributes her birth date as 1910.² Her actual date of birth was 1907, but Kahlo manipulated the figures in order to allow her birth to coincide with the outbreak of the Mexican revolution, a fact that Chadwick fails to note. Chadwick's book stresses the sexual politics of Surrealist painters, but in failing to rectify or note Kahlo's self-mythologization Chadwick buys into a myth at the expense of the political point which the changed birth date foregrounds: Kahlo *aligns* herself with the revolution at the same time that she symbolically gestures towards a natural affinity with it. It is this ambivalent use of politics and myth which Chadwick fails to document, opting instead, albeit unconsciously, for a representation of Kahlo which is symbolic in its very beginnings.

According to Chadwick's biographical note André Breton, the 'founder' of European Surrealism, 'discovered Kahlo's work in Mexico in 1938'.³ Chadwick's assumption here is a common one, but Kahlo's work pre-existed Breton's coming; he might have popularized her work and *appropriated* it for the forwarding of certain of his own ideals, but the metaphor of 'discovery' is singularly inappropriate here – although it is entirely appropriate to a first-world treatment of Kahlo's role in the history of a Eurocentric movement. Breton himself expressed Kahlo's significance in European and (infantilized and eroticized) feminine terms: 'We are privileged to be present, as in the most glorious days of German romanticism, at the entry of a young woman endowed with all the gifts of

seduction, one accustomed to the society of men of genius'.⁴ Sarah M. Lowe has an interesting observation to make on the relationship between Breton and Kahlo:

Kahlo was unmoved by Breton's charismatic self-importance, in part because of the predominantly intellectual and abstract cast of his notions. While Breton was inspired by what was alien to the rational world of the white European male – madness, women, the exotic – Kahlo's creative impulse came from her own concrete reality.⁵

Here the critic merely paraphrases the artist's own resistance to appropriation by a 'movement', for Kahlo herself ironically stated: 'I never knew I was a Surrealist ... till André Breton came to Mexico and told me I was'. Her own reaction was to reject the arrogance of Breton and the label of Surrealism, saying of herself that 'I never painted my dreams ... I painted my own reality'.⁶

The opening lines of Hayden Herrera's own introduction to *Frida Kahlo: The Paintings* describes the power of Kahlo's work through a quotation from Breton (her work is like 'a ribbon around a bomb').⁷ Both Chadwick and Herrera also romanticize Kahlo, presenting her in a mysterious, bewitching light, representing the foreign as unknowable, sensual and mystic:

With her carnal lips, surmounted by a slight mustache, and her obsidian-dark eyes slanted upward beneath eyebrows that join like outstretched bird's wings, Frida Kahlo was bewitching almost beautiful.⁸

Here Kahlo straddles the border between the exotic and the grotesque. She is almost an animal (hirsute, 'carnal', bird-like) and 'almost' beautiful (she is seductive, just as she was for Breton). The blurring of her 'species' and her gender ('a slight mustache') present her as a disruptive, carnivalesque figure, and this was reinforced by what many critics cite as her often unconventional (native) dress (Herrera notes elsewhere that 'children used to follow her in the streets. Asking "Where's the circus?"').⁹ It must be acknowledged that Kahlo is simultaneously romanticized and 'othered' by her commentators here. While attempting to present the fascination to which her appearance gave rise, their commentary walks a thin line between celebration and racial stereotyping, valuing Kahlo as an artist but also as that which Edward Said has suggested might be a Western sexual fantasy of the 'orient-as-other', or that which offers 'sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality ... deep generative energies' to the observer.¹⁰ That Kahlo's biographers and critics wish to popularize and make known the work of a female Mexican artist is commendable, but the sensual 'tailoring' of Kahlo as an object for easy 'first-world' consumption seems to be an integral part of her entry into the popular canon. Once again, the price of admission to first-world knowledge and markets seems to be a colonization of image and identity.

In 'Art in America', a review of Kahlo's recently published *Diary*, Jill

Johnston states that 'Even without foreknowledge of Kahlo or her work, or the circumstances of the *Diary's* creation, one can hold it in hand unopened, certain that there is much to enjoy within it.'¹¹ Johnston's review is both positive and accurate. However, it is perhaps in their function as an indicator of Kahlo's assimilation into Western culture that her words are most interesting. Even 'unopened' we have now received enough information about Kahlo for her to have lost her anonymity and otherness – it is as a markedly *aesthetic* object that Kahlo's book can now be appreciated. Johnston's review treats the biographical contexts of Kahlo's work, testifying to her suffering as a Mexican woman, wife and artist. However, her *Diary* can now perhaps 'transcend' its own political circumstances: 'Her diary is a gorgeous phoenix; it adds to the lustre of her posthumous life as an artist'.¹² The ambivalence of such an overcoming of suffering through art is firmly reflected in the Western reception of Kahlo's paintings. Many of them portray a woman's psychic and physical suffering, and these are the ones which arouse the most curiosity. But how much of this curiosity takes these images out of their context, seeing only (and being stimulated by) an abject and suffering woman, often naked with her wounds bleeding? Again, Kahlo's reception walks a line between categories. Is it politically engaging or titillating? What is the significance of the bleeding human body – the bleeding female body, the bleeding *brown* female body?

The 'uses' of Kahlo persist. Martha Zamora, for example, uses a hyperbolic prose to romanticize and invent a narrative (which is almost a fable) in which to represent Kahlo and her work.¹³ At the other end of the scale, Linda Martin Alcoff presents an article called 'Philosophy and Racial Identity' with graphic reproductions throughout. It is an essay that describes itself as an attempt to explore the importance of 'Map-making and race-making', and the crux of the content is classification and the importance of definitions of race and the implications for philosophy, because 'It has committed both crimes of omission – the neglect of race, and crimes of commission.'¹⁴ However, the inclusion of illustrations actually reinforce the very point that Alcoff is making in order to raise the reader's awareness. The illustrations are as follows: David Alfaro Siqueiros 'Ethnography'; Matisse's 'The Hindu Pose'; Kahlo's 'Self Portrait with Cropped Hair' and Cheri Samba's 'Self-Portrait'. The illustrations don't really highlight or explain any of the key issues that Alcoff is dealing with. Subliminally, however, the illustrations are convenient; the subject matter in all four are 'foreign' and are perhaps used in order to 'fit in' with the overall issue of race. While they enhance the lay-out of the piece their relevance is (literally) marginal. The pictures are 'reduced' to the status of decoration. The assumption seems to be that the article is about race, therefore artistic representations of and by non-white people are legitimate and self-explanatory.

The entanglement of 'Kahlo' with 'Kahlo myths' is inevitable, however, and often gives an insight into the specifically post-colonial position that she inhabits. In Hayden Herrera's biography of Kahlo she is described as a

'Mexican Ophelia', a romantic victim.¹⁵ Carlos Fuentes, in his introduction to Kahlo's *Diary*, however, identifies her with a range of Aztec and Toltec goddesses:

It was the entrance of an Aztec goddess, perhaps Coatlicue, the mother deity wrapped in her skirt of serpents, exhibiting her own lacerated, bloody hands the way other women sport a brooch. Perhaps it was Tlazolteotl, the goddess of both impurity and purity in the Indian pantheon, the feminine vulture who must devour filth in order to cleanse the universe. Or maybe we were seeing the Spanish Earth Mother, the Lady of Elche, rooted to the soil by her heavy stone helmet, her earrings as big as cartwheels, her pectorals her breasts, her rings transforming her hands into claws.¹⁶

Here we have a continuation of allusions to things predatory and monstrous, but they are drawn from Kahlo's own cultural context – their meanings remain hidden for a European audience. For Western readers, Fuentes provides a much more familiar analogy: 'Frida Kahlo was more like a broken Cleopatra ... showing us all that suffering could not wither, nor sickness stale, her infinite variety.'¹⁷ Here, however, Fuentes' allusion to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* makes a recognizable political point. The link between Kahlo and Cleopatra is an interesting one on many levels. Both women have ambiguous and diverse racial origins; Kahlo's father was a German-Hungarian Jew, and her mother was of both Spanish and Mexican-Indian descent. Cleopatra's origins are lost in the mists of time, but to the Western mind she appears white if 'exotic', while her historical context suggests that she was black. Both are credited with the ability to enchant and bewitch, and, while powerful in her relations with Antony, Cleopatra is ultimately the pawn of the Roman Empire. Fuentes' allusion suggests that the parallel between Cleopatra and the 'uses' of Kahlo might be extended to include questions of the European 'colonising' of the indigenous female. As a Mexican writer Fuentes has to show his familiarity with the Western canon in order to gain acceptance. What is interesting, however, is his refusal to separate his use of the canon from questions of colonial politics; his refusal to 'buy into' myths without ironically suggesting the political effects of such mythologies.

Against 'Post-Colonial' Theories

At this point it is interesting to consider Stuart Hall's 'When Was "The Post-Colonial"? Thinking at the Limit', which is a sophisticated examination of key issues within this theoretical field. Hall addresses some interesting issues concerning the difficult demarcation line between the colonial past and a post-colonial present. Hall brings into question the word 'post', because the term implies an after-event, as though the liberation process had taken place; thus, in the after-condition, issues connected with colonization are depoliticized, and questions of the identity of the colonized become clearer. Hall quite rightly cites the work of Ella Shohat, who is also critical of

the depoliticizing nature of the term 'post-colonial':

She criticizes the 'post-colonial' for its theoretical and political ambiguity – its 'dizzying multiplicity of positionalities', its 'a-historical and universalizing displacements' and its 'depoliticizing implications'.¹⁸

If critics feel free to celebrate the 'multiplicity' that the figure of Kahlo depicts ('her infinite variety') then we must also attend to the political ambiguity of the ways in which this 'multiple' image has been constructed and utilized. What is important, perhaps, is to explore the political implications of such divisions and usages, rather than celebrate divided identities and euphorically declare that one's divided self is a necessary symptom of our post-modern condition, and a sign of the decay of outmoded 'unities'. Kahlo is a multi-faceted person, but such multiplicity needs itself to be examined in its multiple contexts. Otherwise, as Hall warns, multiplicity itself becomes a form of neo-colonialism:

It is precisely this 'double inscription', breaking down the clearly demarcated inside/outside of the colonial system on which the histories of imperialism have thrived for so long, which the concept of the 'post-colonial' has done so much to bring to the fore ... It follows that the term 'post-colonial' is not merely descriptive of 'this' society rather than 'that', or of 'then' and 'now'. It re-reads 'colonisation' as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural 'global' process – and it produces a de-centered, diasporic or 'global' rewriting of earlier, nation-centred imperial grand narratives. Its theoretical value therefore lies precisely in its refusal of this 'here' and 'there', 'then' and 'now', 'home' and 'abroad' perspective.¹⁹

Analysing the multiple 'uses' that Kahlo is put to adds a political dimension to her work, one which reflects *back* upon our own cultural practices. In a sense, her own struggle to find a voice is mirrored in these 'uses': we speak for her, and she, being assimilated in such fragmentary ways, is effectively silenced. In effect 'post-colonial' as a term 'dissolves the politics of resistance because it posits no clear domination and calls for no clear opposition'.²⁰ The thing that we must recognize is that our own 'acceptance' of Kahlo is at the same time a resistance to her specific cultural experience. Our post-colonial identification with her perpetuates distortions of her already 'dissipated' voice.

One of the main criticisms that Hall and Shohat voice against the concept of the post-colonial is the 'celebratory' nature of the term (rather like the other post-isms that are currently fashionable). What Shohat and Hall try to address is the importance of examining terminology critically, and thus taking on theoretical responsibility and accountability – being sensitive to the assumptions which our thinking makes, and remaining aware of the inherent biases in our classifications. Hall highlights the fact that the term post-colonial has made us think about how we actually set up this binary opposition between the 'good and the bad' periods. The 'post'-colonial

assumes a global chronological frame in which clear boundaries exist between epochs. Shohat suggests that rather than clearly demarcated periods we are left with 'fragmented sets of narrated memories and experiences'.²¹ Hall feels, however, that Shohat leaves us with a somewhat ambiguous state of affairs. To supplement her reading of the 'post-colonial' he cites Peter Hulme's interpretation of the 'post' in post-colonial, which,

has two dimensions which exist in tension with each other: a temporal dimension in which there is a punctual relationship in time between, for example, a colony and a post-colonial state; and a critical dimension in which, for example, post-colonial theory comes into existence through a critique of a body of a theory.²²

Thus the 'post-colonial' signifies the historical and cultural experience of the colonized *after* the demise of colonialism. But it also signals the critique of a body of theory which underpinned colonialism. As my discussion of the 'uses' of Kahlo has suggested, however, there is a third level of tension; that in which the apparent practice of post-colonial self-criticism actually 'steals' the voice of the post-colonial subject in its very bid to re-assess it.

In a real sense, this neo-colonialism is not restricted to the 'stealing' of voices. Frantz Fanon has written that:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.²³

Fanon's point is especially relevant if we remember contemporary representations of Kahlo. In a sense, it was her *own* past that Breton 'disfigured' when he sought to present her use of native mythology as 'exotic', 'uncanny' and 'defamiliarising'. As Lowe remarks in her essay on Kahlo's *Diary*:

Her response to ancient Mexico was quite different from that of the European Surrealists, who sought 'unfamiliar' myths and artifacts to help revitalize their art. The invocation of Aztec civilisation reverberated as political gesture at a time when the growing interest in indigenous art coincided with a keener sense of nationalism.²⁴

Another quotation from Fanon emphasizes the specifically political Mexican identity which Kahlo, Diego Rivera and other Mexican artists were attempting to establish through their use of indigenous cultural images and myths:

The passion with which native intellectuals defend the existence of their national culture may be a source of amazement; but those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested ...

I am ready to concede that on the plane of factual being the past existence of an Aztec civilisation does not change anything very much in the diet of the Mexican peasant of today ... But it has been remarked several times that this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped.²⁵

Now that the specific political use of indigenous images has been raised it is time to turn our attention to Kahlo's own writings.

The Diary

While this essay has been critical of other people's readings of Kahlo, it will now enter into the paradox of providing another reading. Kahlo insists that 'I paint myself because I am alone. I am the subject I know best.' (*Diary*, p.14). However, even the colours that she uses in her paintings evoke cultural meanings at the same time as they exist as 'personal' references:

Magenta—Aztec. old TLAPALI

blood of prickly pear, the
brightest and oldest
color of mole, of leaves becoming
earth ...
leaves, sadness, science, *the whole*
of Germany is this color...
color of bad advertisements
and of good business ...

(*Diary*, p. 211)

For Kahlo, with her mixed origins, the personal and the political intersect in complex ways. What the diary serves to highlight is the politics of her art. She writes that 'Revolution is the harmony of form and color' (*Diary*, p. 243), but acknowledges that 'I am nothing but a "small damned" part of a revolutionary movement' (*Diary*, p. 251). But the political is also linked in essential ways to a pre-Columbian history which colonialism has effaced: 'I know that the main origins are wrapped in ancient roots. I have read the History of my country and of nearly all nations. I know their class struggles and their economic conflicts.' (*Diary*, p. 255). This is perhaps why what appeared to be an 'ethnic' surrealism to Breton existed for Kahlo as a 'REVOLUTIONARY REALISM' (*Diary*, p. 256).

However, this interaction between the personal, the historical and the political made Kahlo uneasy about her work. She senses that it cannot be easily and unambiguously 'put to use' by European political movements: 'I feel uneasy about my painting. Above all I want to transform it into something useful for the communist' (*Diary*, p. 252). In one of her paintings she combines traditional Aztec imagery with that of the 'Communist symbols of a crossed hammer and sickle' (*Diary*, p. 261). What is important is that these images do not represent Kahlo, or her experience of history, as a linear movement or a unified whole. In the painting 'MOON SUN ME?' which faces the hammer and sickle painting, Kahlo uses Aztec motifs, but

the woman who might represent Kahlo herself is gesticulating and asking the question – 'ME?' (*Diary*, p. 261). This image problematizes issues which assume a clear cultural identity and a clear political direction. Similarly, the *Diary* utilizes many languages. She attempts to write in German (*Diary*, p. 212), and this recalls the fact that Kahlo adopted a German spelling of her forename 'Freida', only to drop the 'e' as a survivalist political strategy during the rise of Nazism. The *Diary* also contains 'words from Nahuatl, the Aztec language' for 'many such words have made their way into everyday Mexican vocabulary' (*Diary*, p. 28), and even Sanskrit words and the Eastern yin-yang symbols occur 'collaged' into paintings (*Diary*, p. 240).

The point here is that Kahlo is a nexus of diverse currents and multiple identities, being *herself* a product of interacting histories and colonialisms. What the *Diary* shows, on one level, is her struggle and her *need* to find a 'single' voice. What we read, is evidence of 'fragmented sets of narrated memories and experiences', but her striving for unity and identity is paramount. Does this mean that Kahlo resists the modern 'post-colonial' condition, or does she in effect introduce another layer of complications into it: the *need* for coherence and identity in order to resist the colonizer?

Conclusion

Of Kahlo, Hayden Herrera writes:

In Spanish, she loved to use foul language – words like *pendejo* (which, politely translated, means idiotic person) and *hijo de su chingada madre* (son of a bitch) ... she enjoyed the effect on her audience, an effect enhanced by the fact that the gutter vocabulary issued from such a feminine-looking creature, one who held her head high on her long neck as nobly as a queen.²⁶

Kahlo was known for her use of expletives, and Herrera sees this as the sign of a spirited woman. What Herrera fails to note, however, is the culturally specific relevance of one of these quoted phrases: *hijo de su chingada madre*. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude* Octavio Paz asks 'What is the *Chingada*?', and answers:

The *Chingada* is the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived. The *hijo de la Chingada* is the offspring of violation, abduction or deceit ... To the Spaniard, dishonor consists in being the son of a woman who voluntarily surrenders herself: a prostitute. To the Mexican it consists in being the fruit of a violation.²⁷

The crucial point here must be traced back to the origins of Mexican colonial history, for the prototype of *la Chingada* is Malinche, the Indian guide and mistress of Cortés, the original conquistador and violator of the native people. As Paz suggests:

If the *Chingada* is a representation of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women.²⁸

As the biographical details of Kahlo show, she was, from the time of the horrendous accident which 'deflowered' her, an open and wounded woman. In a real sense, she became at this point identified with the violated body of Mexican history, a history divided against itself, and one which was all too familiar with the range of ways in which the colonizer could 'use' it. Arguably, Kahlo's works anticipate the ways in which she will always be a 'victim' of her own success, and as her life and works are interpreted, marketed, and released in various guises into 'first-world' culture, their abject themes and images, insist, in disturbing ways, upon the violation at the heart of colonial experience and colonized history.

The figure and work of Frida Kahlo suggests that critical analysis, like the marketing of a character, is always distorted by personal investments as they utilize and use the subject in question. Post-colonial theory has a lot to offer in terms of examining and re-exploring fundamental historical and contemporary issues. While it is important to discuss and examine the direction an artist takes, consciously or unconsciously, it is perhaps more important to acknowledge our contemporary *reasons* for such examinations. Failure to do this not only reduces the marginal voice that is being focused upon, but also serves to silence or mask the neo-colonial impulses which are always part of any approach we make to post-colonial issues. By foregrounding the theme of the victim, Kahlo's work reminds us that theoretical approaches, if they wish to avoid compounding the violations which always accompany the attention of the 'first-world', must always acknowledge the cost incurred when we re-articulate the colonized voice.

NOTES

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Olive Senior

MISSING

The last time I went home they told me you were missing.
For the first time since I'd known myself, you were not there.

For one so home-bound, who could have foreseen
such a dramatic ending: Missing Person. Presumed Dead.

Village fiddler, your playing was always out of tune.
Your choice of instrument that creaking violin: What

was it signalling? The ne'er-do-well? The one who failed
to make the grade? The only one who stayed?

Yet, your discordant life played out, I was amazed to find
you hadn't passed through like a false note, a broken string.

You remained a vibrating source of conversation
an endless susurrantion. With the police indifferent,

your poverty-stricken neighbours hired a van
to take them on their own investigation across the river

to the rumoured scene of the crime, for they believed
you had been murdered. Theories were rife:

– *You know how he facety when he tek up his waters.*
– *He did get money so he boasy that day.*

Why had you taken that bus at all?
Where were you headed?

In a life devoid of excursions did you know
you were finally setting out to be tripped up by your fate?

Leaving home like that, you have missed so much:
Mass Dick's funeral, Tennie migrating, Pearlle and baby too,

Miss Carmen's husband dead. So many departed.
The young ones sit and wait. Not in the expectation

of any return. Waiting has become an occupation.
A permanent state. Abandonment the theme of this new life.

One day, I thought I heard you, Jumbieman,
unburied wandering spirit playing an unstrung fiddle

headed our way. Miss D who is the oldest person I know said:
Nah, is you hearing bad. Ol'time sinting done weh

Not even duppy bodder wid we now.
Yes, it's Version Time. Lyrics and licks. A life too raucous

for anyone to hear ghostly fiddlers again. Not you. Not Tambu.
Not Jonkannu. Not silenced Gumbay.

O Tambu you come back
but wha de use?

You come back but
wha de use?

PLANTS

Plants are deceptive. You see them there looking as if once rooted they know their places; not like animals, like us always running around, leaving traces.

Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!) and twine, from their exhibitionist and rather prolific nature, we must infer a sinister not to say imperialistic

grand design. Perhaps you've regarded, as beneath your notice, armies of mangrove on the march, roots in the air, clinging tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere?

The world is full of shoots bent on conquest, invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces, materiel gathered for explosive dispersal in capsules and seed cases.

Maybe you haven't quite taken in the colonizing ambitions of hitchhiking burrs on your sweater, surf-riding nuts bobbing on ocean, parachuting seeds and other

airborne traffic dropping in. And what about those special agents called flowers? Dressed, perfumed, and made-up for romancing insects, bats, birds, bees, even you –

– don't deny it, my dear, I've seen you sniff and exclaim. Believe me, Innocent, that sweet fruit, that berry, is nothing more than ovary, the instrument to seduce

you into scattering plant progeny. Part of a vast cosmic program that once set in motion cannot be undone though we become plant food and earth wind down.

They'll outlast us, they were always there one step ahead of us: plants gone to seed, generating the original profligate, extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed.

g
o
gourd
r
d

hollowed dried
calabash humble took-took
how simple you look. But what
lies beneath that crusty exterior?
Such stories they tell! They say O packy,
in your youth (before history), as cosmic
container, you ordered divination, ritual
sounds, incantations, you were tomb, you were
womb, you were heavenly home, the birthplace of
life here on earth. Yet broken (they say) you
caused the first Flood. Indiscretion could release
from inside you again the scorpion of darkness that
once covered the world. The cosmic snake (it is said)
strains to hold you together for what chaos would ensue
if heaven and earth parted! They say there are those
who've been taught certain secrets: how to harness the
power of your magical enclosure by the ordering of sound
– a gift from orehu the spirit of water who brought the
first calabash and the stones for the ritual, who taught
how to fashion the heavenly rattle, the sacred Mbaraká,
that can summon the spirits and resound cross the abyss
– like the houngan's asson or the shaman's maraka. Yet
hollowed dried calabash, humble took-took, we've walked
far from that water, from those mystical shores. If
all we can manage is to rattle our stones, our
beads or our bones in your dried-out container,
in shak-shak or maracca, will our voices
be heard? If we dance to your rhythm,
knock-knock on your skin, will we
hear from within, no matter
how faintly, your
wholeness
resound?

hollowed
dried
calabash
humble
took-took

how simple
you look

ANNE COLLETT

'And Woman's Tongue Clatters Out of Turn'¹: Olive Senior's Praise-Song for Woman-weed

'What kind of period is it/when to talk of trees/ is almost a crime/ because it implies silence /about so many horrors?' Olive Senior quotes Brecht in the preface to the last section of *Talking of Trees*, but having read her two collections of poetry I am tempted to re-word the quotation to ask, 'What kind of period is it when to talk of trees is to voice so many silenced horrors?' These horrors to which Olive Senior gives voice are acts of barbarianism perpetuated in the name of civilization: European colonization of the Americas. As Wole Soyinka almost said, 'The [wo]man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny.'²

... But
you see my trial! I'm here gossiping
about things I never meant to air
for nobody could say I'm into
scandal. I wanted to tell of noble women

...
... I hadn't meant
to tell tall tale or repeat exotic
story for that's not my style.
But we all have to make a living
and there's no gain in telling stories
about ordinary men and women.
Then again, when gardening
in the Tropics, every time you lift
your eyes from the ground
you see sights that strain your
credulity³

Olive Senior is a woman whose tongue delights in 'clattering out of turn'. Her two volumes of poetry, *Talking of Trees* (1985) and *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), not only give voice to a people silenced by a barbarous history of colonization, but they are also a praise-song to the fecundity and survival strategies of woman's gossip or *su-su* and of the rampant and incorrigible plant life known as 'weed'. Both woman's gossip and weed have much in common, being colloquial by nature and held to

be morally reprehensible by those who would contain them. The First Epistle to Timothy in the New Testament, attributed to Paul, contains perhaps the most infamous attempt to silence woman's tongue under the law and logic of a patriarchal god: 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection' (2:11), 'But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.' (2:12) In particular, Timothy is warned against the seductive dangers of 'profane and old wives' fables' (4:7), 'of tattlers also and busybodies, speaking which they ought not' (5:13), and of 'profane and vain babblings' (6:20) to which women are particularly prone. 'Gossip and fairy tales', observes Marina Warner,

have in common a cavalier relation to accuracy; the truths they seek to pass on do not report events with the veracity of a witness in court. They are partial, tending to excess in both praise and blame; tale-bearing is a partisan activity. Though both forms of speech tend to be practised by the least advantaged members of society, they can achieve considerable, even dangerous, influence by such means.⁴

Gossip is a powerful weapon because it is both partisan and oral: it offers a subversive alternative to the master narrative, and because its point of origin is uncertain, it eludes containment and defies suppression.

Like its sister, weed, gossip is inflammatory. It spreads widely, insidiously and exultantly. In the poem 'Plants' Senior celebrates the counter-colonist moves of 'plants gone to seed,/generating the original profligate,/extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed'. (*Gardening*, p. 62). Weeds, observed Joseph Dalton Hooker (director of Kew Gardens during the period of intense economic botanizing in the latter part of the nineteenth century), are 'the tramps of our flora',⁵ tramps that Senior has significantly feminized rather as vamps. 'Weed', continues Crosby, 'is not a scientific term in the sense of species, genus, or family, and its popular definitions are protean; so we must pause to define it. In modern botanical usage, the word refers to any plant that spreads rapidly and outcompetes others on disturbed soil.'⁶ This definition seems particularly appropriate to the context and concerns of Senior's *Gardening*, for it is these very qualities that she praises: a protean nature and a capacity to adapt, survive and indeed, thrive under 'disturbed' conditions. In 'Meditation on Yellow' Senior catalogues a history of plant/people possession by the European colonizer:

I've been slaving in the cane rows
for your sugar
I've been ripening coffee beans
for your morning break
I've been dallying on the docks
loading your bananas
...
I've been chopping cocoa pods
for your chocolate bars

I've been mining aluminium
for your foil
(*Gardening*, p. 14)

Take the 'y' off the your and it becomes 'our'; but Senior does not desire neo-colonial possession of plantation crop and the dubious profits of capitalist greed. Rather she sings the praises of woman-weed – song of survival and of rebellion – that will, when the battle is won and rights of possession regained, concede personal and specific ground to the cultivation of a sustenance that represents a unification of body, mind and spirit:

you cannot stop
Yellow Macca bursting through
the soil reminding us
of what's buried there

You cannot stop
those street gals
Allamanda
Cassia
Poui
Golden Shower
flaunting themselves everywhere
(*'Meditation on Yellow'*, *Gardening*, pp. 16-17)

Translated/transplanted to the specific context of the Caribbean or the wider Americas, the 'profligate,/extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed' ('Plants', *Gardening*, p. 62) takes the form of the non-cultivated, wild plant, native or that which is welcomed as a native because it refuses commodification and has no part in the rapacious process of plantation agriculture. Human weed, not always but often aligned with female gender and the profligate sensuality of othered body, is a significant trope in *Gardening* that has genesis in the seeds of the female-shaped 'gourd' that prefaces the poetry collection. In the poem 'Gardening on the Run' Senior cogently and wittily historicizes the imperial entanglement of fear and desire, self and other:

Although for hundreds of years
we were trying to stay hidden,
wanting nothing more than to be
left alone, to live in peace,
to garden, I've found
no matter what you were
recording of plantations and
settlements, we could not be
omitted...

...
...Now I have
time to read (and garden), I who

spent so many years in disquiet,
 living in fear of discovery,
 am amazed to discover, Colonist,
 it was *you* who feared *me*. Or
 rather, my audacity. Till now,
 I never knew the extent to which
 I unsettled you, imposer of order,
 tamer of lands and savages,
 suppresser of feeling, possessor
 of bodies. You had no option
 but to track me down and
 re-enslave me, for you saw me
 out there as your own unguarded
 self, running free.
 ('Gardening on the Run', *Gardening*, p. 108)

Typically, colonial plantation agriculture lays waste vast tracts of natural vegetation in order to plant profitable crops like sugar cane, coffee, cocoa and cotton. In the Caribbean the success (that is profitable outcome for the conqueror/colonizer) of plantation agriculture was enabled by the transportation, transplantation and commodification of foreign peoples and foreign plants. Not only slavers but economic botanists had blood on their hands. Kew Gardens itself⁷ provides the most condemning evidence of this rape and pillage, as do the various botanical gardens throughout the British colonies that were planted out, generally at Kew's instigation, with seed pilfered in the name of science, progress and civilization. Jamaica's 'Parade Gardens', over which a statue of Queen Victoria has presided since 1887, is an example of one such garden, of which Olive Senior notes, 'Parade Gardens aka Victoria Park aka St. William Grant Park were laid out in the heart of the city of Kingston in 1870-71 on the "Parade" which was formerly used by British troops. Over 120 trees including 35 different species – some unique to Jamaica – were planted out.' (Notes to 'Talking of Trees', *Trees*, p. 86). These botanical gardens acted not only as storehouses of plundered seed, but were insignia of imperial power, and as such, were often the first public works to be created in the new colonies, at once a symbol of foreign occupation – foreign roots laid down in the conquered land – and (usually) an indication of contempt for the local flora – the vernacular 'weed'. (It was unusual to plant natives in these 'royal gardens'.)⁸

In a previous essay⁹ I have suggested that botanical imperialism was effected by a linguistic colonization that severed culture from nature, a severance in part achieved through the substitution of a signification that denoted specific and particular historical relationship between community and plant with that which was/is scientific, 'objective' and rapaciously imperialistic in its obliteration of history prior to European 'contact' and its righteous unrightful possession, removal and commodification of plant life. This is a right that Olive Senior's poetry contests. *Gardening in the*

Tropics seeks to re-assert 'native title' by a poetic process of incantation/declamation: a naming that recalls and reclaims storied relationship between human and plant communities, re-uniting body/mind, physical/spiritual binaries imposed by European manicheism.

The botanist that had for so long taken the (often) female form of herbalist/healer/wise-woman/witch was replaced in the mid-eighteenth century by a new breed of scientific botanist (therefore predominantly male because necessarily a member of an educated elite), whose plant knowledge was systematized by an objective nomenclature and institutionalized by the formation of the Linnean Society of 1788. These men of science replaced the popular, vernacular, and therefore, place/people specific plant names (like 'Woman's Tongue' or 'Mountain Pride') with the nominative objective language of species and genus – a language of patriarchal imperialism – a language that indeed refuses subjectivity to that which is deemed to be other in a dualistic system of thought (self/other, white/black, man/woman, mind/body, culture/nature). Naming is a possessive function and this process of re-naming laid imperial claim to the natural world far beyond the shores of the European garden. A naming that does not function upon a system of personal relatedness, one that does not recognize a history of human/plant relationship, generalizes and de-possesses the plant of particular human claim, or people of plant claim. It in fact refuses story, also denying the intimate and entangled relationship of 'nature' and 'culture'.

Olive Senior's poetry articulates the possibility of the mental in the material, it refuses Cartesian metaphysics and suggests that wild women are a powerful breed, as signified by the ancient correlation of witch and weed, or in other words, 'the lady is a tramp'. In notes on 'Talking of Trees' (*Trees*, p. 86), Olive Senior remarks with characteristic irony upon the 'beautification' of Kingston gardens in which only one native inhabitant, 'Woman's Tongue who has become a downtown street vagrant', remains to tell a story that is both 'theirs' and 'ours'. This is a story in which transplantation, containment, oppression, suffering and most importantly, survival, is a colonial history of plant and people entanglement that results in a heritage of shared and meaningful signification. A meaningful signification is that which allows us to make informed sense not only of the past and present, but also of future possibility.

The signatory poem of *Gardening in the Tropics* takes the form of a gourd – a gourd becomes vessel of word. This pictorial poem represents a re-habitation of culture in nature. It signals the felt need to heal the wound made by the imperialistic ontological incursion of Europe in the Americas:

Yet hollowed dried calabash, humble took-took, we've walked far from that water, from those mystical shores. If all we can manage is to rattle our stones, our beads or our bones in your dried-out container, in shak-shak or maracca, will our voices be heard? If we dance to your rhythm, knock-knock on your

skin, will we hear from within, no matter how faintly, your wholeness resound? ('Gourd', *Gardening*, p. 7)

Unlike the Burton Palm House,¹⁰ whose transplanted inhabitants bear the linguistic signification of a foreign culture upon their captive bodies in the form of a latin name-tag, the gourd is the original source of word. Nature is not only deemed to be intelligent and capable of meaningful inscription, but is source of culture. The gourd is female, that is, ovarian, in shape and might also be seen to be female in signature – an inverted representation of the European scientific symbol of the female. The resemblance may be coincidental, but fitting, as Olive Senior's body of poetry might be seen to invert patriarchal determinants of nature and woman.

Like the palms in the Burton Palm House and the African peoples of the Caribbean, the seeds of the calabash have also been transplanted in a new soil, but although cut adrift from its African soil of origin, the ancient calabash, 'humble took took', retains its vernacular name and some remnant of original meaning given voice, rhythm and ritual in the Caribbean. The dried gourd still has the capacity to tell old and new stories – binding a people in a communal knowledge of past, present and future.

In Senior's poetic garden, nature study becomes culture study: a 'significant marker on the road of life' ('Anatto and Guinep', *Gardening*, p. 75), creating historical linkage between generations of people and ensuring a continuum of story. If that link has been lost due to the violent breakages imposed by a colonizing culture, then she would recover them and re-establish meaningfulness of nature study/natural history through her poetry. Thus the enmeshed and symbiotic relationship of people and plant is recovered and celebrated in the stories of anatto and guinep, starapple, pineapple, Madam Fate, Mountain Pride, fern, guava, pawpaw, bamboo and the histories of alternative gardening.

In an article on Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*,¹¹ François Lionnet, points to the parallel tropes of mango and maroon, both of which connote the wild, uncultivated and free, and both of which imply a radical resistance to any form of hegemonic control.¹² She quotes from Cliff's novel: 'Some of the mystery and wonder of mangotime may have been in the fact that this was a wild fruit. Jamaicans did not cultivate it for export to America or England – like citrus, cane, bananas ... For them the mango was to be kept an island secret' (p. 4); and 'The Windward Maroons ... held out against the forces of the white men longer than any rebel troops ... Nanny was the magician of this revolution – she used her skill to unite her people and to consecrate their battles' (p.14). The mango, observes Lionnet, represents femininity and fertility; and linked as it is to maroon culture and the mother tongue of a creole vernacular language,¹³ it also represents the survival power of female resistance. This exuberant abundance that refuses to be ploughed under or submit to commodity culture finds

resonance in Olive Senior's woman-weed/word. The invincible Nanny appears too in Senior's tropical garden ('Amazon Women, *Gardening*, 97), mother of the maroon culture, a brave and resourceful woman and survivor against incredible odds (known to have caught the bullets of the enemy in her bum and farted them back!), but Senior refuses to partake in a battle of the heroines – despite her protestations of innocence, she would rather fantasize, 'tell tale', 'repeat exotic story' and indulge in a little gossip. She appears to reappropriate and valorize the mode of communication for which women have been condemned and deplored at least since Eve, by men of course; but this is not the whole story.

Trinh T. Minh-ha has recently remarked upon the postcolonial and feminist critique of a tendency to 'oppose nature to culture, to feminize and primitivize it within the escalating logics of confine-and-conquer, or expropriate-and-dispossess systems fundamental to ideologies of expansionism', and notes that 'critical debate has moved past the phases of assimilation and rejection to that of struggle (to use Franz Fanon's terms), where affirmations and negations are diversely reappropriated as strategies and tactics toward the emergence of new subjectivities.'¹⁴ The same might be said of creative work, that so often charts the ground of concern well before what might increasingly be viewed as a colonizing tendency of critical response to appropriate the creative text of imagination within a 'scientific' discourse that is both elitist and universalizing. The parodic and self-reflexive tendency of Olive Senior's work effectively refuses this most recent form of colonization.

In the time-honoured tradition of the folk story/fairy tale that is both familiar because ageless and yet different because new each time it is retold, Olive Senior leans over the fence and imparts a little gossip, or *su-su*, to her reader/listeners, thereby both validating and celebrating an orality and colloquiality of woman-word:

Su-su
Su-su
Su-su

Once upon a time
there were trees on Parade

Trees on Parade?

Trees on Parade. Listen:

The Ebony trees are celebrating rain
Spathodea's lapping Kingston like a flame
On the western railing Scarlet Cordias burn
Casuarina weeps Laburnum's numb
And Women's Tongue clatters out of turn:

Who hears this? Who sees this? And who knows?
(*Talking of Trees*, *Trees*, p. 80)

Now we hear, we see and we know something more of a secret history – secret because thought unworthy of record, or secret because deliberately silenced. We have shared story with the trees, we have shared knowledge because our lives are signified by theirs. Their past is our past; their future is our future; but gossip leads more often than not to loneliness, derision, sadness and suspicion. Although there is something of regret in the lines, 'No more//Su-su/Su-su/Su-su', because an allusion to the absence of trees talking in whispers each to each and each to us, there is also a refusal and repudiation of gossip as that which is better spoken so all might hear. Gossip then might be seen to be a necessary survival mechanism, a mode of speech that defies patriarchal containment, but the day must come when woman's talk rises above the fearful whisper of a colonized and oppressed people to 'belly an' bawl it out ya.' (p. 84) Olive Senior enjoins us to 'roll in the Dustbowl/and kick up our heels' shouting in celebration the names of rare and beautiful trees, 'Sissoo/Sissoo/Sissoo'. (p. 85) We cannot afford to stand any more on the doorstep, boys dreaming of the hunt and girls of freedom:

We stand quietly on the
doorstep shivering. Little boys
longing to grow up birdhunters too
Little girls whispering
Fly Birds Fly.
(*'Birdshooting Season', Trees*, p. 2)

Our salvation, Senior would seem to suggest, might be found in the recognition that our spiritual and physical sustenance lies in the shared garden of our own making. We have not been expelled from an Eden by a wrathful god, jealous of his kingdom of knowledge, but by our own refusal to share knowledges and to recognize the sacredness of worlds that are no less valuable because we cannot fit them into our narrow epistemologies:

... Listen
to me (and don't tell anybody):
Once you find the right spot
for your garden, before you fell
a tree or pull a weed, be sure
to ask pardon to dig, with a
sprinkling of rum for Mother Earth's
sake (you should also take a swig
and rub some over your head
in case there's a snake.)

...
... And when the vine is nicely
blossoming, ask a pregnant lady
to walk all over it to make the
fruits set and grow full, like
how she's showing. I don't have

to tell you plants won't thrive
if you're quarrelsome. Sometimes
I go to my fields and sing. The
birds join in and we have a real
harmony going. I keep the crops
happy, treat them right, so

they'll put out their best
for me ...

...

When they ask me for my tips,
I take a deep breath and come
right out and say: Just Live Right
and Do Good, my way.

('Advices and Devices', *Gardening*, pp. 109, 111, 112)

Is this poem valorizing different ontologies and epistemologies? Is it lending support to an essentialist ecofeminism? Or is it refusing the systematization of knowledge and the safe exclusive ground of moral orders? What Senior would appear to be refusing is a competitiveness based upon universalizing hierarchical positions, patriarchal or otherwise, that perpetuate and prop-up systems of exploitation and oppression in the name of the right and the good. She would appear to be suggesting that these rigid systems of order and control are not exclusive to a particular gender, race or class, but determined to a large extent by enclosure of the mind within a particular set of inherited historical parameters. In order to attempt an escape from 'the nightmare of history'¹⁵ and the inherited parameters of colonial determinants of self and other, Olive Senior declares her freedom of choice: 'My spirit ancestors are those I choose to worship':

...Understanding
reaches to shake hands across history books
blood kinship may well be a fairy tale
heredity myths mere lies, Yokahuna as real
as the Virgin Mary, Coyaba as close as Heaven.
('To My Arawak Grandmother', *Trees*, p. 11)

This Arawak grandmother is chosen 'for affirmations pulsing still/in spite of blood shed or infused.' (p. 11) In her chosen 'mother's garden', blood is sap, red is green.¹⁶ Olive Senior's poetry celebrates the intense sensuality and spirituality of a green that is both nurturing and nurtured ('green nurtured me', 'Cockpit Country Dreams', *Trees*, p.3); and in 'Touchstone' she writes:

This is the only way for the mind
to wander: firmly balanced against the hoe
rooted in the earth, grounded
in the province of my fields.

The soil warms to my feet. I am based
in reality. Cannot stray far become
a cloud dreamer. The grains of wood
score calendars in my hands.
(*Trees*, p. 14)

So what then is the relationship between the wild profligate weed, those street gals 'flaunting themselves everywhere', and a 'rooting in the soil' that is secure, sustaining and home-based, 'grounded in the province of my fields', as imaged in the *Gardening* poem, 'Hurricane Story, 1944':

My mother who hardly ever spoke
crooned hymns in the garden
to her skellion tomatos pumpkin melon
which thrived (as everybody knows)
from her constant labouring
(nothing like a pregnant woman to encourage
pumpkin and melon) (p. 25)

Both are image of female fecundity, the one wild, the other domestic, the one young, the other mature. Perhaps a return to Crosby's definition of weed would be helpful here. He writes: 'Weeds are very combative. They push up through, shade out, and shoulder past rivals. Many spread not by seed as much as by sending out rhizomes or runners along or just below the surface of the ground, from which "new" plants sprout...' Weeds are the necessary creative rebellion¹⁷ that compete effectively for living space in disturbed areas, to grow profusely, as Crosby puts it 'in miserable micro-environments'. They are effective because they spread underground – they are secret and subversive. They are the gossips who develop a network of sister-strength. They build links and bridge gaps. 'They grow fast, seed early, and retaliate to injury with awesome power. ... As they take over disturbed ground, they stabilize the soil, block the baking rays of the sun, and, for all their competitiveness, make it a better place for other plants than it was before.' Having taking re-possession, and established 'native title', weeds, 'When the emergencies are over, ... give way to plants that may grow more slowly but grow taller and sturdier. ... Weeds thrive on radical change, not stability.'¹⁸ The wild and the cultivated sustain each other in perpetual cycle. They are symbiotic in relationship, as indeed, are wild word and cultivated word. As Marina Warner has suggested, 'Gossip and narrative are sisters, both ways of keeping the mind alive when ordinary tasks call; the fiction of gossip – as well as the facts – act as compass roses, pointing to many possibilities.'¹⁹ In a comprehensive and lucid discussion of ecological thinking, Michael Zimmerman observes:

So long as people conceive of themselves as isolated egos, only externally related to other people and to nature, they inevitably tend to see life in terms of scarcity and competition. When people conceive of themselves as internally

related to others and to nature, however, they tend to see life in terms of bounty, not scarcity, and in terms of co-operation, not aggressive competition.²⁰

You know what I need

one leaf for sorcery
one leaf for prophecy
one leaf for healing
one leaf for the pot

O wilderness

O harmony

('Osanyin: God of Herbalism', *Gardening*, p. 117)

NOTES

1. Olive Senior, 'Talking of Trees', in *Talking of Trees* (Kingston: Calabash, 1985), p.80. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text short-titled *Trees*.
2. Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (London: Arrow Books, 1972/85), p. 13.
3. Olive Senior, 'Amazon Woman' in *Gardening in the Tropics* first published by McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1994; subsequently published by Bloodaxe Books, 1995. Quotations are from the latter edition (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1995), p. 97. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text short-titled *Gardening*.
4. Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blond: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 49.
5. Joseph Hooker is quoted by Alfred Crosby in *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), p. 149.
6. *ibid.* Crosby, p. 149.
7. Kew Gardens is a botanical garden situated in the wealthy west of London and was initially the property of the British Royal Family. It became a public pleasure garden and scientific laboratory and library in 1841, when it won the battle to be maintained by government funding.
8. See Donal P. McCracken, *Gardens of Empire: Botanical Institutions of the Victorian British Empire* (London: Leicester UP, 1997).
9. Anne Collett, 'Gardening in the Tropics: a Horticultural Guide to Caribbean Politics and Poetics, with Special Reference to the Poetry of Olive Senior', *Span*, 46 (April 1998), pp. 87-103.
10. The Burton Palm House was erected in Kew Gardens between 1844 and 1848, specifically designed by the architect, Decimus Burton, to house the gardens' collection of tropical palms, some of which grow to a height of over 60 feet.
11. Michelle Cliff, *Abeng* (New York: Crossing, 1984).
12. Francois Lionnet, 'Of Mangoes and Maroons', in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Sidone Smith & Julie Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 337.
13. Lionnet's article includes a fascinating discussion of creole linguistic resistance and disruption (see in particular pp. 330-337).

14. Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Nature's r: A Musical Swoon', in *FutureNatural: Nature, Science, Culture*, ed. by George Robertson et al. (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 88.
15. This is a reference to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922): 'History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.' (London: Bodley Head, 1960), p. 42.
16. Reference is made here to Alice Walker's collection of 'womanist prose', *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London: Woman's Press, 1984).
17. Reference is made here to Edward Kamau Brathwaite's concept of 'creative rebellion' as used in his talk on *Mother Poem* at the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean and African Literature Conference, 27 September 1980 (University of Warwick).
18. Crosby, pp. 168-170.
19. Warner, p. 49.
20. Michael Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), p. 242.



The Palm House at Kew Gardens in mid 19th century

KIM FARLEIGH

So Fantastically Innocent

In New Delhi, people eat and breathe anything. The pollution at night is surreal: neon lights blurred in a filthy mist. It is an alien world of docile cows and loud traffic in an atmosphere of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon monoxide. Visibility is often down to three hundred metres. There is an overwhelming sense of decay. Pockets of stench enter the nostrils in the rickshaw wind. The stars are blocked out by the gaseous mess. There is the continual presence of eccentric noise. Vehicles bleat like ducks and camels. Magnificent historical monuments rise out of smoky slums. A fingerless, grimy beggar waits at the traffic-lights for donations to a cause that I will never know. A legless man, semi-clothed, drags himself along on a trolley. Camel-drawn carts trot through the streets. The idle cow wanders free. Cows are littered everywhere like dozing cats. I know I'm going to be amused by actions foreign to myself, but by whom? Almost crushed at forty miles an hour between a car and an elephant. Staggering nonchalance of those using the roads. Occasional sights of people defecating and urinating in public. Stagnant pools of murky water. Liquid death beneath smoggy filth. The strange sensation of Westerners being the ones who look abnormal.

Night-time at Kamal's place: can hear neighbourhood watchers bashing iron gates with metal rods. Three holy men, arm-in-arm, bellow out a mysterious chant. The lemon, iridescent glow of light illuminates the interior of a tent housing two families who live on the street across the road. Tim snores nearby on the other side of the room. Have already had to deal with false preconceptions, like taxi drivers who know where they're going, and the existence of shops being obvious to the naked eye.

Next morning I meet Kamal. Paunchy, fresh-faced, helpful, talkative, cheerful. Over from Switzerland to see his family for Christmas. Keeps referring to his Vietnamese-American girlfriend as 'baby'.

'Oh baby,' he keeps saying, 'you know you can't do that.'

It seems as if Kamal is not too impressed with many of Baby's suggestions. Baby was born in Saigon. At the age of seven she went with her mother to Los Angeles. She met Kamal in Switzerland. Her boyfriend's admonishments are expressed with amused fatherliness. He seems to be touched by her angelic innocence. He is happy to play the role of sensitive, insistent mentor, of concerned criticizer, of intrigued guide. Tim knows him from university. I know Tim from a German class in London. Our first day

in New Delhi was spent at the lotus-leaved temple of a religious sect. Met a lot of strange people from around the world who cannot be bothered experiencing the mental effort required to display commonsense. A lot of ad hoc modifications produced to support a belief system whose ramifications have not been thought through. Chi – better known as Baby – continues the theme. She decided to spend the day parting with three-and-a-half thousand US dollars; all went on carpets. After she, Tim and I have agreed to go early the following day to Agra, I say to her: ‘How do you know that those carpets are going to arrive in the States?’

Immediate panic followed by relief as she says ‘I can get Kamal’s family to follow it up.’

‘What if,’ I then tentatively surmise, ‘they go there and they find that the carpet shop no longer exists?’

Chi then begins insisting that Kamal should go there the next day ‘and pick the carpets up’.

This is bothersome for Kamal who’s come home for both business and personal reasons. Eventually, he says, ‘Okay baby, okay, I will.’ Kamal has come to India to set up a software company. Time is short for him. He knows that Baby will be badly hurt if he pursues far more important matters and neglects her carpets. Too bad about his business. It’s difficult to understand how someone who’s spent the first seven years of her life in a war-besieged city can be so syrupy and naive; then I discover that Baby’s mother worked in the U.S. embassy. An image of burly Americans giving Baby candy and patting her insincerely on the head filled my mind. Constant, undeserved, unconditional adoration, delivered for being so sweet and innocent. A different experience from those napalmed kids in the paddy fields. A different experience endured by those through the window of the bus on our way to Agra. I see steam and smoke emerging from mud-filled slums in depressions beside the road. I find it incongruous seeing beautiful women in gorgeous fabrics emerging from the entrances of these mud-grey hovels that populate the ground. Bodies are strewn all over the ground besides the road in the early morning; they are waking from another uncomfortable night in the open to begin another tiresome day of hunger. They shuffle and blink. They all seem to be wearing the same variety of rag. No unconditional approbation for them.

That night in Agra, Tim, Chi and I are having a discussion in a restaurant. Later, Tim was to say, ‘There was one point where I thought that there may have been some hope for her, but the obituaries killed it.’

Chi was astounded that I read the obituary sections of newspapers. She was oblivious as to why I wished to take such an interest in people’s lives. She found it morbid that I ‘wanted to read about dead people’. Didn’t I know that life consists of radiance, and pleasure, and beauty, and butterflies, and little girlie things, and nothing else? What was wrong with me?

It dawned on me that she was so accustomed to receiving eulogies without justification that she could not understand why I was inspired to read about

the lives of people who had struggled to succeed, who had been motivated to conceive of miraculous ideas that had changed the course of history. She was completely ignorant of the fact that the future emerges from the past. She even said that 'the past has had no effect' on her 'life'. Tim and I were glad that she was going to be going back to New Delhi in a few days time, for this was an individual who had been patted on the head so severely for no apparent reason that it was impossible to judge to what extent she was prepared to go to next to be treated like a sweet, little girl. Whether we liked it or not, we were going to find out.

Agra is near a well-kept, deserted, medieval city called Fatehpur Sikri. On the busride out there, we saw a bear in chains. I could see something in the middle of the road in the distance. At first, I thought it was a woman fully-clothed from head to foot. Then I realized that it was a bear with a chain around its neck being held by a man carrying a very threatening-looking stick. Tim and I groaned. We assumed that the bear was forced to dance so that the man could make a living. It was really an appalling sight. I noticed that Chi seemed unmoved by it all.

Inside the ornate gates of the city we came upon a large courtyard surrounded by light-crimson-coloured buildings joined by colonnaded walkways. A small bridge went over a pond in front of that building where the original owner used to live. At equidistant spaces along the walls were towers topped by slanting roofs. Local women in saris made striking contrasts of colour against the clay, pastel walls. Several of them took photographs of their relatives amidst the sumptuous remnants of this now departed world.

As we walked in through the gates, a litter of puppies sniffed and leapt about. The mother of these creatures was on the other side of the courtyard lying contentedly in the shade. In comparison to what I had seen so far in India, these dogs were in animal heaven. Chi sighed adoringly and sat down and deposited one of them on her lap. I gave the puppy a pat, then Tim and I wandered off to explore.

We found it a touch unreal walking around this walled town that was once, effectively, a maharaja's palace. We visited the sleeping chamber of the great man and contemplated how wonderful it would have been to have lived in such splendour in a town where every member of the closely-knit community assumed that your being had been showered by serene light. Such magnificence is only afforded by fate to a few. At that moment, Chi was showering it upon an innocent puppy.

When the journey through this easy, opulent, medieval world ended, and the bus was ready to take us back into the real world, the world of overpopulation, struggle, treachery, and despair, we discovered that she had been with the dog all day. I was the last one onto the bus. Chi was sitting behind Tim. I sat next to Tim. He and I had not seen Chi all day in the deserted city, for she had spent the entire day at the entrance, where she had first come across the puppy. When we realized this, Tim turned around

and joked: 'I thought that you were going to bring it with you.'

Chi smiled and said: 'I did.'

We glanced down at her lap. It was there. Tim and I looked at each other in astonishment. If Chi was under the impression that we were going to say, 'Oh, how sweet,' and smile serenely, then she was seriously mistaken. When Tim and I glanced at each other, we found it difficult to contain our cynical delight. Intelligent cynics adore watching idiots making fools of themselves, and Tim and I were no exception.

Back in Agra, we were sitting in the courtyard of our hotel having lunch. The puppy was asleep on Chi's lap. There was no question that the dog was better off with its mother in the opulent place that we had just been in. The mother, who looked in good shape, and who was probably being fed by the employees of the walled city, was described by Chi, by way of rationalization, as being 'too skinny to produce milk'. This excuse for her absurd behaviour did not explain why the puppy looked in such excellent health. To substantiate her observations she tried to feed the puppy some hot milk. When the already-satiated dog (Chi was under the illusion that it was 'starving'), showed no interest in its meal, she shoved the puppy's snout into the liquid, causing the tiny creature to unleash a high-pitched yelp of intense pain. Most beings usually respond this way when their faces have been deposited into boiling fluid. Tim and I looked at each other and metaphysically shook our heads. The puppy's behaviour deteriorated from there. It was once a happy, contented fluffpot, living with its mother in a wealthy place, and now it was having force-feeding techniques applied to it by a stranger keen to prove an unprovable point. Then Tim asked her what she 'intended to do with it?' She then said that 'Kamal's family'll look after it. They'll adore it.' Tim and I smiled at each other ruefully.

As it was not possible to convince her that not everyone on earth indulges in unwarranted adoration – as Tim put it later, 'That dog will represent nothing more to Kamal's family than an extra mouth to feed – they'll get rid of it as soon as her back's turned' – we decided to get up and head off to the Taj Mahal. Chi couldn't join us because she had been squabbling over the price of a ticket back to Delhi, and was waiting to find out if she had managed to get the ticket that she wanted. She said she would join us later in the Taj Mahal, once she had organized her return trip.

In the rickshaw on the way over to the Taj Mahal, Tim and I expressed our bewilderment at her irresponsible naivety. She did not comprehend the mentality of the country she was in.

'Imagine,' I said, 'being in a situation where the friend of a relative dumps a dog on you – particularly in a place like this.'

'Right about now,' Tim replied, 'it's probably pissing on her.'

'It's inevitable,' I said, 'that something will.'

Tim burst out laughing.

Chuckling, we dashed through the dusty mayhem of the dilapidated streets. Several men on foot were carrying ridiculously awkward and heavy

loads on their heads. Their grim expressions of resignation to the inevitability of their desperate lot was in stark contrast to our arrogant hilarity. Piles of rotting garbage had been crushed underfoot. Packs of homeless animals fought over the scraps that the beggars could not be bothered touching. An atmosphere of already pungent humidity was made even more redolent by the stench of frying fat. I would have been sick had I been forced to eat the 'fat cakes' that these roadside chefs created on their portable hot-plates; but for many here, they were a common snack. No succulent seafoods in garlic and butter for them.

The inside of the Taj Mahal complex is kept from view by high, clay-red walls. A security check at the gates made it obvious to Tim and I that no pets – if such a thing actually exists in India – were allowed to enter. My first glimpse of the famous monument confirmed to me that its reputation as one of the world's premier architectural wonders is more than justified. It is one of the great buildings of any era. In the distance, past a series of rectangular ponds and patches of immaculately cut lawn, it sits, from the entrance, like an exquisitely carved sculpture of perfectly symmetrical marble. The imperious magnificence of its four corner-towers is in perfect harmony with the voluptuous curvature of the central dome. The fact that it is a mausoleum built by an emperor in despair, grieving at the loss of his deceased wife, imparts upon it an emotion, and a beauty, that only love can impart. We wandered towards it past the ponds whose smooth surfaces reflect the tops of the domed towers. A point was reached where we had to remove our shoes. Up a flight of steps we went, over a surface of inlaid marble, towards the stunningly-patterned walls. The remarkable magnitude of the place becomes apparent at the top of the stairs, where things spread out so amply, you get the impression that you have just stepped out onto a vast, frozen sea of creamy marble. We walked down one side of the central dome and reached a waist-height wall that overlooks an enormous plain at the rear of the building. You discover that you are elevated above the world at the top of a cliff. Ribbons of mist were threaded through the plain's distant trees. A lone figure was meandering along the bank on the far side of the river, at the base of the cliff, the only figure in sight in the immense silence of the breathless plain. I wondered how incredible this building, caught in the peachy serenity of late-afternoon light, showered by orange radiance, must have looked to him down there, all alone; then I turned and marvelled at how the Taj Mahal's brilliance is increased by the presence of hundreds of local women in striking dress. How bland Westerners look in comparison!

We observed the translucent precious stones and marble, heard the perfect acoustics that were elongated to a perfect pitch, saw all the indigenous flowers of India engraved into the walls, then we sat down and enjoyed the pleasures of the twilight; free from the irrepressible touts, we talked about Chi. I said that I was 'fascinated by her total lack of common sense. She's so concerned about being perceived as a sweet, harmless, innocent, little thing

that she's got no regard whatsoever for pragmatics. I've never come across an ego like hers before.'

As we were talking about her, she suddenly appeared, without the dog. She was happy that her train ticket had been sorted out to her satisfaction. Tim asked her about the puppy. She said that she had to 'leave it, as they don't allow animals in here.' Surprise, surprise. Her justification for this was as follows, 'There are more tourists here, so someone will look after it.' It was as simple as that. She had left the dog, all by its defenceless self, in the garden outside the inner walls; it was now not her problem. Someone else could deal with it.

She left us to go and look at the building; Tim said: 'She's obviously never had any bad shocks. She can't connect her absurd actions to her actions in general. She'll only learn that it's not feasible to pick up stray puppies, and try to take them into public places. She's still just a little girl.'

I was fascinated by her massive failure of judgement. She believed, without question, that her actions had been reasonable and morally sound. She was clueless as to the danger that she represented to an ordered society. In New Delhi, I had been absorbed by the way that she always went into childish degeneration, like a floppy doll, every time Kamal indulged in his affectionate recriminations. Every time Kamal said, 'Baby, you know you can't do that,' she would tilt her head to one side, and drop her shoulders, secretly pleased with the sweet amusement generated by her naive ways.

In the dimness of early dusk, we left the grounds of the great building and re-entered the real, contemporaneous world. A tidal wave of touts, restaurateurs, rickshaw drivers, and general scumbags were waiting to use us for pecuniary means. Their methods of expanding their wallets by reducing the sizes of ours – amateurish methods done with an insincere smile were really no different to the methods employed by Chi. The dog had only been a device to enable her to be patted sweetly on the head; but the plan had backfired, and now that dog, the true victim, was alone, in this unforgiving place, where the uncaring masses scoff rice from banana leaves, and drop the remnants of their meals onto the greasy roads, so that the stray animals and the multitudinous beggars can fight for the scraps that remain,

Six hours previously, that sweet puppy had been with its mother in a privileged position in a beautiful, unusually-well-preserved, historical town, and now it was cast into the tortuous realities of this desperate place by someone whose egotistical innocence was so dangerous, that she was as oblivious of the damage that she had just reeked upon that innocent creature, as she was to the damage that she was inevitably going to reek upon herself.

We found out later that the carpet-shop owners had disappeared.

Taban Lo Liyong

A SHOT IN THE EYE

Contrary to what journalists cooked up
Dada does not mean daddy:
Big, medium or small;
Good, passable or bad;
Charitable, murderous or mean...

Dada does not mean first steppings
Or children uttering their first sounds
Or storks jabbing at frogs
Or musicians rhyming tralala...

A man may be called Dada
Not because he has lost all his teeth
Nor because he has filed them sharp
Nor because he swims in his pyjamas...

A man may be called Dada
Not because Tzara created a movement
Nor because his fingers are aristocratic
Nor because they can go around an opponent's neck...

A man may be called Dada
But a woman cannot be called Dada.

For a woman, the name would be *Leyong*
Signifying her father's demise before her birth...

A man may be called Dada
Because he is *odong-piny* –
Has remained to be born
When his father had departed –

A man may be called *Dada*
Because he is *Obote* –

Gleanings, post-humous...

Deprived, depriving...

Depraved:

both.

THE MASTER TORTURER'S COMPLAINT:

Your Excellency says we should not experiment any more
With breaking bones and creating new shapes of limbs and torso
Moulding freaks with one eye, half teeth, chopped genitals
Nor tune the sons of devils to sing their weird antiphona

Well, Your Excellency, ours, is a profession as any
We try to improve on our potentials, better our performances
And, by all accounts, that is progress and attention to duty
I am sure Your Excellency has not found us wanting in extracting confessions

The Sons of Britain taught us how to deal with enemies of the crown;
The Sons of Israel passed on to us the fruits of their tribulations
The Sons of Hitler gave us the vintage performance,
Even the Small Koreans were not without resources...

As you can see we have a formidable history of professionalism;
And selflessly we do our duty, for the stability of the state:
We always succeed in getting to the bottom of the matter:
True confessions, false, faked, or made-up: are all the same

It is not the poor sons of bitches whose cries reach hell or heaven:
It is their relatives and the populace who fear for them
And who therefore choose to walk the straight and narrow path:

The victims are as good as dead: we have no problem with them...

Come to think of it: I have also had enough: the pitiful cries
The beggings, the curses, the bribes – attempted and turned down, or
otherwise –

I am also ready to call it a day; to retire and learn to embrace my wife
But what do we do with those surrealistic works of art in the galleries?
Of course, unlikely as it might be, perhaps Your Excellency is also fed-up?
I would not mind a rise or change of professions, this arena is too confining!!

'If according to you, the artistries are superlative, and not observable
Then you may abort!'

Thank you. I ask for no more.

(A fisherman caught a Nile perch. Inside it were what looked like human limbs. Some were held together with iron chains and aluminium rods.)

MARK STEIN

Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature¹

So why complain? Ethnicity is in. Cultural difference is in. Marginality is in. Consumption of the Other is all the rage for late capitalism. Finally, it appears that the 'coolie' has become cool. Yet in congruence, racial violence continues to soar as Fortress Europe further secures its borders.

Sanjay Sharma et al.²

I suggest that the emerging *cultures of hybridity*, forged among the overlapping African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas, that constitute our common home, must be seen as crucial and vital efforts to answer the 'possibility and necessity of creating a new culture': *so that you can live*.

Kobena Mercer³

'In the 1990s, it has become protocol to distinguish "black" (that is, African Caribbean) and "Asian" groupings in Britain' Ashwani Sharma and others have recently noted.⁴ I take this quotation as emblematic of a moment in British cultures where alliances between distinct black British groups have become more difficult and where diversity is emphasized. It stems from a study which responds to a growing presence and commodification of 'Asian' musical production in Britain such as bhangra, Southall beat, northern rock bhangra and house bhangra. This increased visibility of an Asian cultural presence is true for the arts generally; think of the soaring success of the sculptor Anish Kapoor's work; think of writers such as Hanif Kureishi, Meera Syal, and, obviously, Rushdie, or younger ones like Bidisha⁵ or Atima Srivastava. There are the fields of fashion to be considered, or food, or TV with programmes like *Goodness Gracious*. While limiting my inquiry to the field of writing, I'm pursuing the larger question of the politics of 'Asian' cultural production *vis-à-vis* the older and overarching denomination 'Black British'.

This paper was sparked off by a conference in Trier where Hanif Kureishi's work was being discussed in a panel on Indian literature.⁶ The texts of the writer Kureishi, son of a British mother and a Pakistani father, can obviously be discussed in several contexts; my point is not that his texts should not be discussed alongside Indian writing in English. However, I do wish to ask which context or contexts would seem most productive and most adequate in the reception of Kureishi and fellow writers. English literature? Immigrant literature? Anglo-Indian writing? Pakistani literature?

British-Asian literature? Kureishi is not an immigrant in Britain and the suggested national labels are either too imprecise (English literature) or, conversely, not ambiguous enough, as in the case of Anglo-Indian and Pakistani literature.

It is noteworthy in this context that Sharma et al. insist on the distinction of black and Asian writers. On the surface this appears sensible in that the term 'Asian' may seem to provide a more accurate *cultural* context which in turn might serve as a basis for well-grounded readings;⁷ this division would also counteract the 'Manichean bifurcation of black and white which inevitably renders Asians invisible and marginal to the practices of (sub)urban culture' as one of the contributors contends.⁸ However, the term Asian is structurally similar to the term Black British which it seeks to supplant; it has its own internal silences in that it in turn renders invisible and marginal cultural production which is not *South* Asian. It is obvious that 'Asian' is used to mean of Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Indian origins. 'South Asian' is sometimes used for the sake of preciseness but more often than not the authors revert to the overarching 'master signifier "Asian"'.⁹ Secondly, the *political* category 'black' which was more in vogue in the 70s and 80s than it appears to be today, did not only purport to include 'the Asian experience', to use the parlance of those days; its *lack* of cultural specificity – black referring to Asia, Africa and the Caribbean – was deemed to be of strategic value. The value of the concept of *political colour* was to emphasize a related predicament in Britain of those migrant groups and their descendants who had come there from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

In finding a sufficiently and productively ambiguous name for the context in which to consider Kureishi and fellow writers we should keep in mind the productive context from which the literature emerges. World Literature, Post-colonial Literature or, indeed, New Literatures in English come to mind, all of which, however, fail to provide any specific cultural context; they at least indicate the hybrid quality of the cultural-social-political backgrounds and – to varying degrees – point to the insufficiency of national literary labels.

Another contender in this attempt at naming a context is the term 'black British literature'. Whilst all three parts, black, British and literature, deserve interrogation, I will merely focus on the first two, 'black British', that produce so fruitful a tension. This tension is a reciprocal one in that 'blackness' redefines 'Britishness' and vice versa. In his 'Rivers of blood'-speech of April 1968, Enoch Powell voiced his opinion that while black immigrants might receive or have British citizenship they would never 'truly' become British, let alone English. It is the edge then – contesting this exclusivist view – of the phrase 'black British' that is useful for our purposes.

But is Kureishi a 'black' writer, and if so, what does this mean? In the British context, the adjective still frequently refers to a rather wider group than in the American debate; according to the concept of political colour, 'black' refers to 'people of colour'. In his bibliography of black British

literature, Prahbu Guptara offered a most straightforward definition in 1986:

Being 'black' is a matter of visibility, with social and political consequences. Being a writer is a matter of culture. Being 'British' is a matter, not of culture, but of what passport you carry. In my view, therefore, 'black Britons' are those people of non-European origin who are now, or were in the past, entitled to hold a British passport and displayed a substantial commitment to Britain.¹⁰

A somewhat more discriminating definition was proposed a year later by David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1987): "Black British" literature refers to that created and published in Britain, largely for a British audience, by black writers either born in Britain or who have spent a major portion of their lives in Britain.' The authors go on to ask: 'But what of the term "black"? Does black denote colour of skin or quality of mind? If the former, what does skin colour have to do with the act of literary creation? If the latter, what is "black" about black? And what are the literary forms peculiar to "black" expression, what are the aesthetic structures that differentiate that expression from "white" expression?'¹¹ The question of the nature of the relationship between 'blackness' and cultural production is raised here and unease with an essentialist definition of 'blackness' and 'black literature' is palpable. The term black British literature is accountable then in two ways. What holds the writing together, what are the shared features on the one hand, and what is it surrounded by, what is non-identical with it, where does this body of writing stand in relation to other bodies of writing? Maybe we can keep Guptara's and Dabydeen & Wilson-Tagoe's definitions pending now, the one being somewhat bureaucratic, the other more subtle and inquisitive.

In 1988, Alastair Niven presented a paper entitled 'Black British Writing: The Struggle for Recognition' making his case that writing 'produced in Britain by writers of non-European immigrant origin or descent, is being under-recognised both internationally and at home'.¹² Like the preceding commentators, Niven uses black British in its overarching sense. It is ironic that ten years later – with black British writing eminently successful and central to the British cultural production – the terms of its reception remain undefined. A paper presented by David Dabydeen at the same conference lead the novelist and poet and Fred D'Aguiar to write a rejoinder. While granting that there are a black experience, black language, and black creativity, D'Aguiar argues that there 'is no Black British literature'.¹³ The term is criticized for falsely suggesting homogeneity. He concludes '[I]t is *within* the arena of Britishness that battles of class and race and sex are being waged, not from those outside on some privileged inner circle'.¹⁴ In this important debate, Dabydeen, on the other hand, had asserted: 'I feel that I am different, not wholly, but sufficient for me to want to contemplate that which is other in me, that which owes its life to particular rituals of ancestry'.¹⁵ He accuses D'Aguiar's position of aspiring to Universalism and is unwilling to drop the epithet 'black' in order to be considered a writer.¹⁶

The term 'black British' is older than the above would suggest; it was deployed by the Caribbean Artists Movement in the late 1960s, a movement which, in the words of its chronicler, Anne Walmsley, 'bridged the transformation of Britain's West Indian Community from one of exiles and immigrants to black British'.¹⁷ This concept is deemed wider by Stuart Hall according to whom 'the term "black" was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain'; this concept implies, politically speaking, that "'the Black experience", as a singular and unifying framework ... became "hegemonic" over other ethnic/racial identities'.¹⁸ It is this assumed hegemony of 'the Black experience' (in the narrower sense) which poses a significant threat to the feasibility of an overarching concept of a 'black British identity'.

Hall has argued further that this first phase of black British cultural politics has seen an ongoing shift towards 'engag[ing] rather than suppress[ing] difference'.¹⁹ What Hall is describing as two phases is the attempted contestation and dissolution of the hegemonic ethnicity of 'Englishness' by its confrontation with an ideally unified black British counter-ethnicity giving way to the construction of new ethnic identities. 'What is involved is the splitting of the notion of ethnicity between, on the one hand, the dominant notion which connects it to nation and "race" and on the other hand what I think is the beginning of a positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins, of the periphery'.²⁰ Hall here suggests an understanding of ethnicity that is not tied to nation, "race", or culturalism, one might add, but to a positive understanding of the margin as a space of productive negotiation, productive of centredness, of cultural, social and political change. These pluralist spaces feed on their diversity – instead of a self-inflicted homogeneity to counter Englishness – and it is from this that they derive their energy. What Hall calls the 'politics of ethnicity predic[a]ted on difference and diversity'²¹ is a move towards strengthening the possibility of a political concept of black British identities, in the plural, precisely by weakening its boundaries according to a 'fuzzy logic' as Robin Cohen recently put it.²²

What is at issue here too is the question which of the new British groups come into representation and gain according recognition.²³ This seems to be foremost a political question, one that cannot be addressed primarily in terms of literary artefacts. As long as the term black British implies only the experience of people with a Caribbean or, more narrowly still, an African-Caribbean background, it will rightly be considered hegemonic by those groups with a dissimilar background. If, however difference and diversity become recognized features of black British identities, more of the different groups' experiences can be considered part of a diverse 'black British experience'.

This essay opened with a quotation from *Dis-Orienting Rhythms* whose stress of the need in the 1990s to distinguish between black British groups is expressed not without scruples; the editors ultimately concede the 'valency

of "Black" as a political positionality that strategically unites disparate groups against increasingly organized and vicious manifestations of Euro-racism'.²⁴ What they refer to as the 'autochthonous naming of an Asian identity that takes account of the cultural specificities' indeed constitutes a prerequisite for a re-making of political alliances;²⁵ however, it may unfortunately also constitute an entryway to essentialist ethnic identity politics.

To make a leap back to aesthetic questions and to texts proper, we have to remember that the term 'black British literature' does not necessarily claim to represent a singular experience. Rather I use it as a collective term that covers an imagined experiential field of overlapping territories. While at its narrowest it merely refers to writers with an African-Caribbean background, at its widest, it can include writing that takes recourse to domains such as Africa, Asia or the Caribbean and attendant cultural and aesthetic traditions. Britain, then, is being constructed as a part of, say, the Caribbean, if and when a writer chooses to fashion such an alliance and to draw on these distinct cultural traditions, thereby forging a new, a third space. This new space denoted by the label in question is far from homogenous; on the contrary, its heterogeneity is one of its defining features.

The collective category of black British literature is, for example, undermined by the recently launched Saga prize 'for the best unpublished novel by a writer born in Great Britain or The Republic of Ireland having a black African ancestor'.²⁶ The prize was founded by the American actress and writer Marsha Hunt. Echoing D'Aguiar's dictum, she claimed '[t]here is no black British fiction' and conceived of the prize as a remedy.²⁷ However, the prize was under fire before being set up. Hunt explains: 'The Commission for Racial Equality didn't want it to happen. They told me I might be subject to prosecution if I went ahead; the Society of Authors withdrew support'.²⁸ The fact that a Folkestone-based travel and insurance firm catering for the aged sees a literary prize as a fit means of drawing attention to its business gives testimony to the wide interest now directed towards black British literature. However, the exclusive conditions of the prize – barring, for example, people with an Asian or Indo-Caribbean background – confirm once more the unsettled nature of the debate surrounding black British literature.

Another example contra the concept of black British literature is the Asian Women Writers Collective,²⁹ whose founders drew up very precise boundaries as to who could become a member of the group. The group is not only constructed around gender and cultural background. Despite the seemingly wide catchment area insinuated by its name, the group is not open to all Asian Women, not even to all Asian Women in Britain, but merely to those who are resident in and around London. Their aim is 'to explore our common identities as Asian women and as black women, but without making invisible the differences in our experiences and cultures'.³⁰ Here, subtly, the fear of being culturally erased were culturally distinct groups to be included is manifest; unfortunately this fear entails a very

exclusive politics. The collective has its pendant in the younger Caribbean Women Writers Alliance which seems to cater largely for women of an African-Caribbean background.

There is certainly room for these more specialized collectives of creative work and debate. Yet, following the politics of their logic of demarcation, one could aim for even more specific groups, e.g. collectives of British-based Guyanese or Jamaican or Pakistani writers, which in turn could be subdivided further into Indo-Guyanese, Sino-Guyanese and African-Guyanese. While there may be reasons for that, too, for one practicability would certainly go against such fundamental ethnic particularism as far as the *reception* of literature is concerned. Moreover, the danger of overspecialization and exotic pigeon-holing looms largely. One could add that a divide and rule policy cannot be countered in this way either. The present day conflict in Guyana over the elections earlier this year, too, illustrates the implications of such demands.

Most importantly, we cannot assume that writers from a particular place by default situate their writing in an aesthetic tradition and a cultural context that derives from their own or their parents' or their grand-parents' birthplaces. Ultimately we have to be wary of attempts at categorizing writing neatly according to one or two ready parameters. It may once have seemed less problematical to see Selvon merely as a Caribbean, Emecheta as a West-African, and Rushdie as an Indian writer – although seeing them as Trinidadian, Nigerian, and, in view of Rushdie's parents' derivation, as Pakistani writers, respectively, would then have been equally possible. However, I would argue that today it is no longer appropriate to ignore the *various* allegiances and connections that mark contemporary writing.

There is a tendency towards viewing cultural production in international or transnational terms.³¹ While, for now, this may be more appropriate for film and music than for writing it cannot be ignored that literature does increasingly transcend national boundaries, be it in subject matters, production, reception or the blending of aesthetic traditions.³² One such attempt is Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic, about which he says:

[T]he reflexive cultures and consciousness [sic] of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the 'Indians' they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not ... sealed off hermetically from each other.³³

There is not enough space to deal with Gilroy's study in depth here. What is striking about it is that the transnational space he delimits in formulations such as the above, at first includes Asians but throughout the book Gilroy mostly regresses to the formulation 'African diaspora', thereby dissolving his own concept. Moreover, in opposition to his stated intention, he also largely neglects West African cultures so that in the end the Black Atlantic is largely determined by the US, Britain and the West Indies.

[D]espite the fact that efforts are made to give this 'black' identity a single or unified content, it continues to exist as an identity alongside a range of differences. Afro-Caribbean and Indian people continue to maintain different cultural traditions. 'Black' is thus an example, not only of the political character of new identities – i.e. their positional and conjunctural character (their formation in and for specific times and places) – but also of the way identity and difference are inextricably articulated or knitted together in different identities, the one never wholly obliterating the other.³⁴

The heterogeneity of black British identity which allows, in fact presupposes, that distinct cultural traditions persist has been emphasized above. This rests on an understanding of identity which is not totalizing but instead names a facet, a plane, and possibly a phase, that overlaps with other facets, planes and phases. In his book *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, the cultural critic Kobena Mercer has taken this position further when he proposes not only a concept of black British identity as a hybrid, diverse and pluralistic identity, but also focuses particularly on the impact of the transformation of British culture by the second generation. 'Britain too has been massively reconfigured' Mercer argues.³⁵ With reference to writers like Ben Okri, Kureishi, Caryl Phillips and Jackie Kay he concludes: 'Their presence has critically transformed the culture'.³⁶

The reference to distinct generations is crucial. While writers who migrated to Britain from the colonies and former colonies, like Sam Selvon or Kamala Markandaya do indeed have an ancestorship that ties them specifically to another territory, another cultural background within their own lifetime, young writers, of the so-called second or third generation, e.g. David Dabydeen, Caryl Phillips, or Kureishi, Patience Agbabi, Bidisha and Ravinder Randhawa came at an early age or were born in Britain. A return to 'cultural origins' for these writers is not easily conceivable; their cultural bonds are much more mediated than those of their parents and grandparents. Much has been written about the difficulties of 'returns' and it is an ongoing concern and theme in much postcolonial writing.³⁷ In view of this I would argue that the term black British literature can be useful particularly when applied to today's younger writers.

One of the values of the term black British literature lies precisely in its reference to Britain and Britishness and its implied proposition that these concepts are subject to redress. While the insistence on 'black British-ness' was initially provocative in that it meant 'we're here to stay', the term is now provocative in a different way: it is about redefining where one is staying, about claiming one's space and about re-shaping that space. The younger writers speak and write from a much more empowered position than the Windrush veterans. As novelist Andrea Levy put it: 'if Englishness doesn't define me, then redefine Englishness'.³⁸ There is not only a strong and clear element of rejection in Levy's statement – the rejection of a traditional, an exclusive, unattainable Englishness – but concurrently one of attachment, however tenuous and circumspect. Writers like Kureishi, Diran

Adebayo or Patience Agbabi have been brought up in Britain, are British, but are so in a specific way. It is this intricate attachment to Britain that is written out if we insist on categorizing writers only according to their parents' cultural origins.

At this point a short digression to another 'post'-word seems in order. A. Robert Lee uses the term 'post-immigrant' writing in his edited collection entitled *Other Britain, Other British*.³⁹ Juxtaposing writing 'from an angle no longer one of immigrant periphery' with that of the 'post-immigrant frontline and beyond',⁴⁰ Lee deploys a terminology which apparently cuts between those who themselves migrated and those who were born in the country of their parents' destination. However, the term 'post-immigrant' writing could instead be read as denoting all texts written in the wake of migration, i.e. the first postcard home phrased on the SS Empire Windrush to the most recent writing of the descendants of the Windrush-generation.⁴¹ I will try to follow both possible readings below. This procedure seems warranted since Lee, while deploying a host of other terms in his essays, does not unfortunately impart a definition of 'post-immigrant' writing or the remaining terminology.⁴² He attempts to 'seek recognition of changed working terms for "England" or "Britain"' and argues that the novel of the younger writers he discusses 'also, are British novels, however differently arrived at ... the Britain they inscribe'.⁴³ What happens with writers who 'were' migrated at an early age (like Caryl Phillips, brought from St. Kitts aged 12 weeks)? The term 'generation', too, does not help us here; between the arrival of the Windrush in 1948 and the Immigration Act of 1971 more than one generation arrived; and the arrivants, while mostly in their twenties, did indeed vary in age. More importantly, the term generation has its drawbacks in that it suggests an organic connection between the literature of different writers who may or may not stand in a relationship of entailment. Without entirely denying the usefulness of differentiation according to distinct generations, I'm not convinced that it is helpful to cut off entirely the younger writers from their predecessors which seems a consequence of Lee's scheme. This is not to ignore the specificity of the contexts in which the Windrush generation wrote. However, there are shared experiences – as well as crucial differences – that are elided by a singular focus on immigration.

Lee's text allows an alternative reading. If the term 'post-immigrant' writing is taken up in its wider signification, we arrive at a notion of diasporic writing (characterized by the requisite processes of mediation or *translation* in the way the term has been inflected by Bhabha and Rushdie); this concept would include not only 'black British literature', Jewish fiction in Britain,⁴⁴ and writing by descendants of other exiles, migrants, expatriates, refugees, and displaced persons in Britain. With a terminology of that scope, however, it is clearly ignored that within its catchment area there may exist only little propinquity, with some traditions being far more

established than others.

Since my interest in black British literature has started to grow, I have noticed the following process on my bookshelves: the African section, as well as the Indian one and especially the one containing Caribbean writing have been shrinking alarmingly while 'black British lit' is constantly growing. Now, that is only in part due to the acquisition of new books and the rapid growth of the field. It is also a sort of internal cannibalizing process whereby I move more and more books from their old place to the newer one. I'm only mentioning my personal filing problem here since I wish to register – against my own position – the danger of a new hegemony of writing from Britain fed by a containment that includes with what it cannot compete, a process at the expense of some of the other 'new literatures in English'.⁴⁵ Not every writer who may have passed through London once thereby qualifies as black British.

Seen from a different angle, however, one could object that the label 'black British literature' is too divisive – rather than too inclusive – in differentiating between different writers of Britain. While having argued that there is sufficient reason for speaking of a body of black British literature one could interpret the growing influence of this writing in a different way as well. In view of the current predominance of black British literature, maybe in the future we will be able to address a new 'new literature': namely that of Britain as a whole.⁴⁶ Structurally similar debates concerning the 'postcoloniality' of US-American culture are currently ongoing.⁴⁷

For the time being, however, the argument put forth here is for a body of writing that is wide enough to accommodate a variety of black British literary forms, a body of writing that allows one to cut across the bounds of cultural identity, ethnicity, class, generation, and gender. The category 'black British literature' does not tend to reify nationalist categorizations since the second adjective is kept in check by the first one, and its references to cross-cultural and transnational cultural contexts. The writing, moreover, is not necessarily confined to one category for I would argue for a 'plural-alliance model' whereby, for example, Selvon can be and ought to be read in West Indian, Canadian, as well as black British contexts.⁴⁸

The purpose of this essay is not to look at creative texts in any detail, but to address some of the methodological problems involved in dealing with black British writing. In order to illustrate the particular difficulties raised and the points made, and to base some of the above claims more solidly, I would like to touch on the recent novel *Some Kind of Black*.⁴⁹ Diran Adebayo, born in 1968, has landed quite a success with his debut: in 1995 he was the first winner of the Saga prize for his unpublished manuscript. A year later he was the first living man to be published by the major feminist publisher Virago, to much acclaim. His novel of formation, a 'counterblast' against nationalism,⁵⁰ is about Dele, who graduates in law from Oxford and to

maturity in the course of the text. He has to come to terms with the incidents surrounding a racist police attack on his sister Dapo which leaves her in a coma for the most part of the text.

Dele describes himself as 'a Londoner yet to set foot in his home country' and feels 'nostalgia without memory' for the Nigeria he misses without ever having visited.⁵¹ At the same time, 'Nigeria' is revealed to be an unstable signifier, as even in London we need to differentiate between 'Nigerians resident off the Jubilee Line' and 'Nigerians coming like Yardmen in Hackney'.⁵² What is significant is that the novel is solidly based in the South of England but this setting is described as constantly in flux; and it is *this* context which frames the novel. Not unlike the dance music Sharma et al. discuss, Adebayo's London is marked by an irreverence for ethnic or cultural purity and a delight in play and re-fusing.

The novel's protagonist moves between Oxford and London where he has grown up. In the different areas of his life he self-consciously performs several different rôles, thereby illustrating the concept of the performative character of identity. In growing up he has not only to negotiate the conservative expectations of his parents who came to London in the 60s, and who constantly remind him of what life in Nigeria would have been like but he is also pressurized by streetwise friends in London into 'acting Jamaican' and wearing 'rudebwoy gear'.⁵³ It is in keeping with the novel's interest in divisions and concurrent dislike of absolutist identity politics that Dele's London is fragmented according to a North-South divide on the one hand, as well as along the lines of distinct diasporic communities: 'Nowhere in London gave him that feeling of crossing a border the way Brixton did'.⁵⁴ These divisions are borne out by the linguistic varieties and vernaculars Dele employs and by his self-conscious dress sense. He faces a 'a mini clothes-crisis' when inclined to don a patterned agbada while feeling a strong desire to disassociate himself from the 'cult-nats in similar attire'.⁵⁵ Nubism is not for Dele. This multiplicity of divisions disallows any clear identification with *one* locality, identity or positionality; if anything, *movement itself* between localities, identities and positionalities is characteristic of Dele. As he tells his sister: "'roots this" and "roots that". I'm more worried about my branches, you know. It's the branches that bear fruit and tilt for the sky'.⁵⁶

The novel plays with the idea of spaces such as the dance hall where social divisions can apparently be temporarily suspended – yet its tragic plot throws this very tenet into relief. As 'the fusion of elements of south Asian culture and the rituals of the reggae dance hall' characterize much of modern Asian Dance music, Dele inhabits spaces where 'social collectivities [are] producing cultures of interbeing and mutual identification'.⁵⁷ These spaces can simply not be accounted for in terms like 'African British literature', 'West Indian literature' or 'British Asian literature'; these spaces feed on the blending and, crucially, *heterogeneity* suggested by the category black British literature and culture.

What is most pertinent for my purpose is the fact that the protagonist Dele

navigates not only from one social rôle to the next; he at once bridges gaps between different communities whether he is with 'African-African's' – who not without irony are tagged as 'hyphenated', – whether he acts Jamaican or whether he contemplates pleading to a policeman 'of colour' when being attacked by the law. It is this navigation across a continuum of black British identities which calls for the novel's appropriate contextualization.

Perceiving of the literature written by Britain's black writers predominantly in terms of the cultural spaces their authors derive from is problematical in that these interpretative contexts point to spaces and attendant cultural practices that were left behind by the writers in question – if not already by their parents or grandparents. The connection, then, to these 'origins' is not unbroken and has to be considered as mediated. This mediation, its processes and achievements, has been under scrutiny in a number of disciplines. Older (anthropological) models analysing the contact of cultures, assuming unilateral processes of integration, acculturation or assimilation, have been surpassed with the realization of the complexity of the processes involved. The settlement of new social, political and creative spaces that are distinct from both, the points of departure and of destination, the settlement of a third space, is reflected in the theorizations of creolization, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity.⁵⁸ Paul Gilroy has stressed that processes of hybridization are misunderstood if conceived of as 'little more than a collision between fully formed and mutually exclusive cultural communities'. Gilroy denies both, a 'vision of authentic British national life' which 'was as stable and as peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated', and the perception of black settlers 'as an illegitimate intrusion' in this scenario.⁵⁹

Since there has been an increased awareness of Britain's ethnic diversity in this century, and since there has been a steady influx of black settlers into Britain from the 20s onwards, but particularly in the 50s and 60s, the existence of a body of literature (and film, music, fine art) reflecting these changed perceptions deserves particular attention. This body of literature not only tells the story of the proliferation and change of British cultures; beyond the thematic level, these changes are reflected – and indeed brought about – by the very existence of these cultural artefacts, along with artefacts and practices not under consideration here. The texts which I have been speaking about, then, *are* part of a newly invigorated British culture.

These texts are not British in a straightforward sense; which texts, if any, are so, is another matter. But they are no more Caribbean, Asian, African in a straightforward sense. The texts – and the processes of hybridization that lie behind them – do not only modify what 'British' means, they concurrently necessitate the interrogation and investigation of this pluralist, heterogeneous, sense of Britishness. The term 'black British literature' contains and expresses a tension between the two adjectives which invariably modify each other. It blends together heterogeneous texts which can and must be considered in distinct reading contexts. At the same time,

its value lies in the very acknowledgement of the provocative blending, not only of Black and British, but also of that which is signified by 'black' here: Asian, African and Caribbean. It thus refrains from referencing ethnic or racial collectivities; instead it indexes a political category which does not purport to represent a homogenous cultural context.

NOTES

1. For their support and criticism I'm grateful to the following people: Yomi Bennett, Markus Heide, Dieter Riemenschneider, Anna Rutherford and Frank Schulze-Engler. A version of this paper was presented at the 19th annual conference of the German Association for the New Literatures in English (1996) in Konstanz.
2. Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk, Ashwani Sharma, 'Introduction', *Dis-Orienting Rhythms: The Politics of the New Asian Dance Music*, ed. by Sanjay Sharma, John Hutnyk, Ashwani Sharma (London and New Jersey: Zed, 1996), p. 1.
3. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 3-4.
4. Sharma et al., p. 11.
5. The full name is Bidisha Bandyopadhyay, but the writer is known by her first name only.
6. The 18th annual conference of the German Association for the New Literatures in English (1995) focused on *Interdisciplinarity* in the light of which the decision to structure the conference programme according to regional/national parameters could appear questionable. But this is not the issue here.
7. Tobias Döring has made the astute observation that the critic's desire to bring light to texts – as well as bringing them to light – resembles the enlightenment project of the explorer and colonial educator; with postcolonial texts, then, it may not be politic to produce readings which seek to explain every textual detail in the interest of clairvoyance. In this respect, the desire for consummate historical contextualization and cultural explanation needs to be somewhat curbed. See T. Döring, 'Reading for Transparency? Rereading the Obscure', in *Can the Subaltern Be Read? The Role of the Critic in Post-Colonial Studies*, ed. by Döring, Schäfer, Stein, *Acolit Sonderheft*, 2 (1996), pp. 90-97.
8. Sharma et al., p. 4.
9. Sharma et al., p. 8.
10. Prahbu Gupta, *Black British Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1986), p. 14.
11. David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tague, *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1987), p. 10.
12. Alastair Niven, 'Black British Writing: the Struggle for Recognition', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 325-32 (p. 326).
13. Fred D'Aguiar, 'Against Black British Literature', in *Tibisiri*, ed. by Maggie Butcher (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1989), pp. 106-14 (p. 106).
14. D'Aguiar, pp. 108-9.
15. David Dabydeen, 'On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today', in *Tibisiri*, ed. by Maggie Butcher (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1989), pp. 121-35 (p. 134).
16. Dabydeen, p. 134.

17. Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement* (London: New Beacon, 1992), p. xviii.
18. Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', *ICA Documents. Black Film British Cinema*, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 7 (1988), pp. 27-31 (p. 27).
19. Hall, p. 29.
20. Hall, p. 29.
21. Hall, p. 29.
22. Robin Cohen, 'Fuzzy Frontiers of Identity: the British Case', *Social Identities*, 1, 1 (1995), pp. 35-62.
23. The formulation 'new British' seeks to stress the ongoing process of negotiation as to who is and what is 'British', a process which of course dates back farther than migration from the former colonies to Britain. The semantic ambiguity of the term 'representation' is crucial in that 'the tension between representation as a cultural or artistic practice of depiction, and representation as a political or legal process of delegation [links] together two strategic axes of contestation: struggles for access to material resources (that is, funding), and debates over aesthetic paradigms and priorities (that is, film language)' (Mercer, p. 18).
24. Sharma et al., p. 7.
25. Sharma et al., p. 7.
26. This quotation is taken from the entry form which contains the 'Saga Prize 1996 Rules.'
27. Kate Kellaway, 'The Undiscovered Country', *The Observer*, 13 August 1995, p. 6.
28. Kellaway, p. 6.
29. The Asian Women Writers Workshop was founded by the novelist Ravinder Randhawa in 1984; it sees itself as a writer support group which organizes workshops and provides space for creative work and criticism. It has since published two remarkable anthologies of short stories.
30. Rukhsana Ahmad and Rahila Gupta, 'Foreword: The Asian Women Writer's Collective', in *Flaming Spirit: Stories from the Asian Women Writer's Collective* (London: Virago, 1994), pp. vii-viii (p. vii).
31. See for example Gregory Jusdanis, 'Beyond National Culture?', *Boundary 2*, 22, 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 23-60; and O.P. Bhatnagar, 'Literature in National and Transnational Contexts', *Journal-of-English-Studies* [Nagercoil] 3 (1980), pp. 1-12.
32. Mark Stein, 'The Black British Bildungsroman and the Transformation of Britain: Connectedness across Difference', in *Unity in Diversity Revisited? British Literature and Culture in the 1990s*, ed. by B. Korte and K. Müller (Tübingen: Narr, 1998) (forthcoming).
33. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 2.
34. Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in *Modernity and its Futures*, ed. by Stuart Hall, David Held, Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp. 274-316 (p. 309).
35. Mercer, p. 3.
36. Mercer, p. 2.
37. One example of many would be Kureishi's essay *The Rainbow Sign* where he poignantly reports: 'I couldn't allow myself to feel too Pakistani. ... As someone said to me ... we are Pakistanis, but you, you will always be a Paki.' Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber, 1986), pp. 7-38 (p. 17).
38. Maya Jaggi, 'Redefining Englishness', *Waterstone's Magazine* 6 (Summer 1996), pp. 63-9 (p. 64). This is reminiscent of a comment made by Kureishi a few years previously: 'It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being

- British isn't what it was. Now it is a more complex thing, involving new elements. So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time.' (Kureishi, *Rainbow* p. 38).
39. A. Robert Lee, ed. *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1995).
 40. Lee, *Other Britain*, 'Changing the Script', pp. 69-89 (p. 76).
 41. Immigration is indeed a crucial factor in 'black British literature'; as Tim Brennan remarked, 'the black British arts scene was born in immigration, and shocked to life by anti-immigration laws and the rise of the National Front'. Tim Brennan, 'Writing from Black Britain', *The Literary Review*, 34, 1 (Fall 1990), pp. 5-11 (p. 8).
 42. Within a few pages, Lee speaks of '[I]mmigrant Britain' (Lee, *Other Britain*, p.70); 'indigenous lives of colour' (p. 71); 'Asian-British or Caribbean-British cultural formations' (p. 71); 'cross- and multiracial England/Britain' (p. 71); 'multiculturalism' (p. 72); 'Black-British diaspora' (p. 73); 'Anglo-Pakistani novella' (p. 75); 'immigrant periphery vs. post-immigrant frontline' (p. 76). The issues surrounding black British literature are quite sensitive, however, and they require sensitivity at the terminological level as well.
 43. Lee, *Other Britain*, p. 76.
 44. Cf. Michael Woolf, 'Negotiating the Self: Jewish Fiction in Britain since 1945' in Lee, *Other Britain*; see also Bryan Cheyette's "'Ineffable and usable": Towards a Diasporic British-Jewish Writing', *Textual Practice*, 10, 2 (1996), pp. 295-313.
 45. In making this cautioning remark there is the following observation at the back of my mind: within English language literatures, British (and American) publishing houses benefit from the ongoing processes of centralization; the metropolis is thus being re-instated while other locations are relegated to the periphery of publishing. See also Margaret Ann Harris' recent article on the new Faber Caribbean Series: 'Writers' Moment', *Sunday Advocate* [Bridgetown], 19 April 1998, p.23.
 46. This seems corroborated *also* by what might be a growing tendency of black British authors, namely to write texts which are 'unmarked' and thus not easily placed within the confines of black British literature. I'm thinking of some of the stories in Kureishi's *Love in a Blue Time* (1997), his recent novel *Intimacy* (1998) and also of Bidisha's first novel, *Seahorses* (1997).
 47. On the 'postcoloniality' of the US see Gesa Mackenthun, 'E Pluribus Unum? Die Position der USA im postkolonialen Diskurs', *Das Argument*, 215 (1996), pp. 373-379; and Peter Hulme, 'Including America', *Ariel*, 26, 1 (1995), pp. 117-123.
 48. Selvon's Canadian or West Indian contexts could obviously be further subdivided, e.g. into Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian writing.
 49. Diran Adebayo, *Some Kind of Black* (London: Virago, 1996).
 50. Diran Adebayo, Interview, *The Bookseller*, 7 June 1996, p. 27.
 51. *Some Kind of Black*, p. 29 and p. 169.
 52. *Some Kind of Black*, p. 180.
 53. *Some Kind of Black*, p. 47 and p. 27.
 54. *Some Kind of Black*, p. 131.
 55. *Some Kind of Black*, p. 216.
 56. *Some Kind of Black*, p. 9.
 57. Les Back, 'X Amount of Sat Siri Akal! Apache Indian, Reggae Music and the Cultural Intermezzo', *New Formations*, 27 (Winter 1995-96), pp. 128-47 (pp. 133-4).
 58. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 2.
 59. Gilroy, p. 6.

Ouyang Yu

THE WHITE AUSTRALIAN

is a nameless guy in asia
he travels with a face borrowed from europe
he is careful not to allow his melbourne or sydney
accents to show through
and he has a good reason:
they wouldn't understand it
if i do not speak like an english or american
he is an intellectual
you know

not many people know about australia
or care
he is too lazy to explain
better pretend to be something you are not
and get better treatment

is a woman
and feels very superior
'cause she comes from a democracy
sometimes mispronounced by her stupid students
as demoncrazy
she would then grow justly indignant
and deplore the lack of sanitation and education
as well as too much hospitality
designed she said
to deceive
she'd sometimes show off her feminism
again sometimes mispronounced as famileechm
by refusing the friendly offer of a male hand
or by taking any bewildered boy students
to task

for daring to crack jokes with her
it is sad however to see
her back to normal
in her native land australia
where she speaks in subdued tones
very demure and coy

is a writer
who becomes interested
doesn't know the language
and is not going to worry about it
the country abounds in cheap efficient interpreters
they not he
are going to provide him with the info
he's got the imagination
he wouldn't be bothered with facts
he is a fictionist someone good at intertextuality

at other times
he is a university administrator
he is not happy with the present state of affairs
at the heart of hearts
too many asians
who do bring in a lot of money
but not as many manners
and respect
they should be kept in their right place
especially the male:
factories fruit and vegetable markets grocery stores
milk bars take-away restaurants
as secretaries as telephone receptionists as library assistants
at best as foremen as students even phd
but not he thought to himself
as university lecturers except to teach in their own language
the administrator was as inscrutable as ever
when he had just done the interview
in which an asian appeared
the decision came out fair and square:
he didn't get it because others had better qualifications
or more experience

while his secret thought was:
that guy should really congratulate himself on being shortlisted

the white australian is a literary editor
who is highly proficient in deciphering identities of names
this is a chinese pretending to write in bad english
that is an indonesian struggling with right diction
that is obviously someone from vietnam
who has not even learnt his basics in grammar
he can get around his political correct corner however
by picking something from within the commonwealth

some srilankan some indian someone who learned english as a baby
though with a different skin
in the end the editor is triumphant:
the quality of english is ensured
and so is the purity

at home he is different
he defines himself and others by the strange word
un-australian
as if it is not in their nature to be bad
which only the un-australian can do

the white australian is everywhere
who is only skin deep
s/he smiles with body
never with eyes
s/he is nice when you first meet
like a trained air-stewardess
there is no hope of becoming their friends
just as there is no hope of their becoming us
because they like their borrowed mothers in england
imitated fathers in america
and blood brothers in europe

is fond of pretty words

but don't accuse him of being a racist
he is not
he doesn't look like one

he isn't one of those blaineys howards diques
he is only a white
australian

too right

Alison Croggon

THE HARBOUR

Angel, how numb your shoulders are,
how they sag with the burden of feathers
that pull you down to the dark rim
of a darkening earth. And when you lift your eyes
from the oily slap of water, they gleam
briefly, a flint that no light gives you,
not the burning iron ships, nor the harboured
moon, nor the flare of a match, your eyes gleam
with the agony of presence.

Briar Wood

BETWEEN THE FLAGS

Surfers say
beware of calm surfaces

where feeder currents run.
Labour weekend, come Monday

the kowhai rains.
Apple orchard parabolas

in a transmarine season.
Magnetic iron sands at Muriwai

like walking in an advent calendar
thinking of draecinas

punkish at Perrinporth.
Twinkling starfish.

Flutter boards buck
in the tumble of Tangaroa.

No household rubbish here.
Hillsides swept stark.

Manuka rumps to the wind.
Puhe's perfume, sunflushed air.

Floating off the coast –

Motutara

Steven Waling

THREE PLACES IN NORTH-EAST LANCASHIRE

After Charles Ives

1. WHALLEY ABBEY

I'm sampling this rather nice fruit cake,
chatting to the driver from Formby. There's
bits of the Abbey all over; we've been lucky

again with the weather. Vestments in Burnley,
statues in Preston, ashlar in various churches.
Our party lunched in Oswaldtwistle Mills,

took scenic 'B' roads through the Pennines.
The Parish Church holds the misericords –
griffins, Green Man, George and his dragon.

Ruins echo to the gossip of birds. There's plans
to restore the monks' dormitories, talk of English
Heritage. I barely remember having been here

past the Gate-house with its original doors.
Not an old haunt, but yes I was here before.
Look round the cloisters, gaps that were windows,

smell the rarefied air of long-dissolved psalms
as the Calder flows back to its source. Once
a line of crosses on old houses, drinking fonts,

marked the pilgrims route from Manchester.

2. HELMSHORE TEXTILE MUSEUMS

This café has a feel of studied neglect: fixed
green plastic chairs, tea, wrapped confectionery.
Like a works canteen, no mats, table cloths,

tinkle of polite conversation. Last time I came
the water-wheel loomed over, twice as large,
four fulling stocks boomed in unison. They've shrunk

in their urine wash or I've grown out if it. Now
hardly any visitors watch the Derby Doubler
pull its threads into line. Then Compton's Mule,

twisting the thinnest of yarns across centuries.
It must have been crammed as a weaver's arse
in this valley, its lodge deep enough for drowning.

There's a World Outside and a World of the Factory:
when the gates first opened Washington was President.
During Lincoln's Civil War, the hands all starved,

built roads between Burnley and Blackburn.
School Parties Welcome. I finish my coffee,
walk out and back past newly done up terraces

where a woman I don't know smiles as I pass.

3 TOWNELEY HALL, BURNLEY

Lemon cake with walnuts, coffee at the Stables
with a wagon wheel on the wall. The priesthole
(guided tours only) keeps my memories intact

till next time. Drizzle disrupts a battlement crow
or raven. Once the ladies inside walked the Long Gallery
this kind of weather, pondering the pious and brave

dead along the walls, who took the veil or died
at Marston Moor. Here's Richard, first to measure
rainfall; a useful skill to pass time by as tenants

plough his fields in the rain. The Great Hall's plasterwork
(Italian, 18th C) does not recall each schoolboy neck
that ever craned up to its mouldings. Did we then step

into the kitchens, run down that secret passageway
that isn't? Time stitched those secrets into the fabric
of these stones, intricate as the *Opus Anglicanum*

of Abbey vestments, orphreys expounding the Life
of the Virgin. I get lost returning through damp woods,
birds shriek out of the gloom. When I reach the road

a bus wakes me, turning round the bend for home.

CÓNAL CREEDON

Dockets 'n' Dowels

Like my danda and my danda's dad, my dad was a cabinetmaker, master craftsman. The lads up in Mulla's said he was a genius; he could make a full piece of furniture, no nails or screws used.

I swear to God, you can never really know what goes on in another man's head, but it's hard to believe that something as slapless as a wooden dowel could turn my dad away from the cabinet making. It was like up until then, his whole life swung around Mulla's. But one day, snap! No more. The day of the dowel dawned.

'Sure any,' he'd say, 'dawfaker could trow a cabinet togedder dese days.'

Maybe it had to do with the fact that Mulla died and his son, the Graduate, took over the running of the yard; or that the Graduate ran the yard from the office and he didn't know one end of a hammer from the other. Maybe it was because there was no mass in the wood joint no more nor the men who knew how to make them. Whatever the reason, there was no doubt but dowels had destroyed the detail of the craft, and enough was enough, and my dad's head was turned.

'Sure dat's not furniture,' he'd throw de mallet down. 'Look! Either you make it! Or the Chinese make it!'

'Take yer pick!' the Graduate would say and walk away.

'Docket's 'n' dowels,' he'd throw the eyes to heaven. 'Tis all docket's 'n' dowels dese days.'

It was like he saw his craft die in front of his eyes and with it's death he caught a glimpse of his own mortality. Somewhere along the line it dawned on him that he couldn't face eternity in some thrown together plywood box fastened with a few aul' dowels. He was a cabinetmaker and only a casket fitting of a master craftsman would do. That's why! That's why at the age of fifty-eight he decided to make his own coffin... in the kitchen..., at home.

He drew together boards from trees grown on different continents. Boards hand-picked from shipments as they'd arrive into Mulla's yard, boards brought together, planked and hobbled away home. It took over a year but he was in no rush, he wanted the finest collection of grains to be found either side of the hardwood jungles of Burma and the Amazon Basin for his masterpiece.

No nails, screws or dowels used, but perfected joints, handed down from generation to generation, grains married so tight together that no man could

pull asunder.

'Look a' dis son,' he'd say. 'Dat's a dove-tail, and dat la, dat's a T-joint. An' see dat one dere in the corner, dat's me own secret F-joint, and I'll show you how to make one a' dem one a' dese days.'

My sister Kathleen lined his coffin with quilted yellow, green and black silk, the colours of The Glen. And in the true tradition of quilts she stitched in a square that didn't match the pattern, a planned mistake so as not to challenge God's pride by creating perfection; split down the middle half red and half white for Cork.

They say that you'd know a shoemaker's wife by the holes in the soles of her shoes and there's a grain a truth in that, because with all my dad's knowledge we didn't have a stick of furniture. I mean, we had beds, the odd chair and all that but no shelves, no presses, no sideboards, nothing special, not if you don't count the coffin. It stood there in the middle of the kitchen on two carpenter's trestles, a sheet thrown over it protecting my dad's handy work and a few wads of white paper to save the sheet. It was our table and we'd gather around...

Kippers of a Friday, roast of a Sunday, one of the days between Monday and Wednesday it'd be bacon and cabbage and with payday on Friday, it was usually fried bread of a Thursday. Same aul ding-dong dinner time, same aul ping-pong chit chat, like Mass night after night, every day of the week, except that is for Saturdays. Saturday was my dad's day.

'De pig is de one animal that you can ate every bit of,' he'd say. 'An d'ya know why? I'll tell ya why! 'Cause we're Christians, dat's why. Tis de only ting dat de Catlicks an' de Prositents has in common. We all ates de pig. Now de Hindoos an' de Muslims an' de Buddas an' all dat shower don't eat no pig, dey has no God. Dat's why we eats de pig. And here in Cork we show our devotion to the one an' only true Jesus Christ Our Lord by not wastin' one mouthful of de God given flesh of de boar, de sow or de banabh.' His excuse for the weekly feast of entrails, off-cuts and offal. 'Not only is it religious,' he'd say, 'but it's part of our kulture. De people a' Cork were atein' pig's heads long before St. Finbarre found us.'

And he was right, 'cause where we came from, the head of the pig often kept the wolf from the door. Never the fur lined devilish faces of the cow or the sheep. Always the pig, whose human-like fleshy jowls, for some reason tasted easier on the conscience. Still and all, there's something evil when two eyes stare out at you from a pot. Maybe that's why he cooked them half-head at a time; split skull and jaw with hammer and axe, slit with carving knife down between the eyes, along the centre line of the snout, right through the palate of the mouth, all the way home to the jawbone.

I'd sit there watching. Sleeves rolled up beyond his elbows and him tearing into and devouring the pig's head. Held firmly by the ear in the one hand and the snout in the other, scraps falling from his mouth to the white paper covered coffin. He'd bate into the prime cut of the cheek muscle just above the tooth ribbed jaw bone, gristle and grease seeping down over his

hard hands all the way to his elbows and the fat from the pig's eye socket, forehead and lock, being smeared all over my dad's face as he'd battle with the jaws of the beast.

At the age of seventy-two, he tried out the coffin for size – found it a mite tight, must have put on a bit of weight. Kathleen blamed it on the pig's head, 'All fat an' bone,' she said. He took to training, you know walking and things – getting fit for death.

But as she got older and he got more feeble the pot boiling came to an end when my dad's pride gave way to his age, and Kathleen took a tighter hold on the household. He was lost for a while, just hanging around like someone waiting for God.

Then one day he pulled the sheets off the coffin again, rubbed his fingers along the grain, no knots, not at all. And it all began simply enough, a little bit of inlay here and there, a simple scroll alone, the side. He then carved the full forty-nine lines of St. Patrick's Breastplate, you know the one, 'Christ be before me, Christ be behind me, Christ be about me' ... right down the length of the lid. And then with oak, walnut, ash and cherry veneer he inlaid the symbols of his craft: the mallet and chisel, the tenon-saw and plane, the pencil and pot of glue and the square and dividers, one at each corner. It was medazza, but he just didn't know when to stop.

Somebody mentioned that the square and dividers was a Freemason's sign and suggested that St. Patrick might have been a Protestant. He spent too much time up with de Unionists to be a real Catholic? So he carved The Virgin Mary on the end panel up by his head and draped around her feet he inlaid the tri-colour in mahogany, ash and pine.

'Let dere be no mistake about it,' he said. 'Not only am I an Irish Catlick, but I'm an Irish Republican Catlick.'

But he didn't stop there. Glen Rovers were remembered by a set of crossed hurleys and sliotar. Then right above St. Patrick's Breastplate he carved the top section of Shandon steeple with a big goldie fish inlaid in beech. He said that the fish on top of Shandon looked down on him in life, so, it may as well look down on him in death. Of course he knew Shandon was a Protestant Church, that's why he put St. Mary's, pillars and all, on the left panel. When my dad's brother Uncle Miah saw St. Mary's he said it was a nice touch, you know remembering 1916, and all that.

'1916?'

'My dad was lost. Ya know like, de G.P.O.,' Uncle Miah pointed to the coffin.

'De G.P.O.? Dat's it dere isn't it?'

'G.P.O.? Dat's St. Mary's, Miah boi.'

'Really? Jesus it looks very like de G.P.O. to me. But now dat ye mention it, St. Mary's looks like de G.P.O., don't it?'

Enough said, my dad chiselled the words *St. Mary's, Pope's Quay*, under the carving and so as not to offend the lads of 1916 he put the names of the leaders down the right-hand panel. And that wasn't the end of it.

Ronnie Delaney was commemorated by a pair of running shoes and the words *Ronnie Delaney Olympic Gold, For Ireland and for Glory*. On went Daniel O'Connell, Michael Collins, St. Finbarre, Terence Mc Sweeney, Tomás Mac Curtain, Christy Ring, Blackrock Castle, Patrick's Bridge... he even had a *Sile na Gig*¹ at his feet, and the work went on until every inch of the coffin was overlaid, inlay on inlay, sort of like a beautiful body mutilated with tattoo.

'An not a dowel in it!' he'd say proudly. And that's the way it went, tapping away at the coffin when ever he took the notion, right up until the day he died.

His wake was a grand affair, even the Graduate and the crowd from Mulla's were there, most too young to remember my dad; all carpenters; not a cabinetmaker between them. In a way it was a happy occasion, you know, people telling stories, that sort of thing. The priest said that in all his day's burying people he'd never seen a coffin like my dad's, this lifted a bit of a laugh... and after the prayers, myself, Uncle Miah and a few others shouldered the coffin from the kitchen. It's a strange feeling, carrying your father in a box.

'Hoi! Hold it lads! Hold it!' Uncle Miah brought the procession to a halt. 'Back 'er up! Here la, try it dis way. No! No! Turn 'er 'round.'

We tried it sideways. We tried it lengthwise, we even tried it upright, but it wouldn't turn in the hall. One into one just wouldn't go. The crowd who had piled out onto the street waiting, were back in the kitchen again standing around the coffin, advice flying, but nothing moving.

The sound of bottles being cracked open again, big roars of laughter from the back. The Graduate was telling me that the furniture trade had changed since de recession ended.

'It's all quality furniture they want these days,' he said. 'They'll pay a fortune for it. Leave the old dab 'n' dowel for the Eastern Europeans that's what I say. But do you know what?' he stopped. 'You can't get a craftsman these days for love nor money,' and he was off talking about something else. Uncle Miah cleared the house and closed the front door behind them. We lifted my dad's board-like body from the coffin and lay him on the floor. And then with the big rusty saw from under the stairs, he cut the coffin in two, right down between, ...*Christ be behind me* and *Christ be before me*...

Twenty-eight dowels to put it together again, six top and bottom, eight on each side and he tacked a sheet of plywood to the base. Just in case. We placed my dad back into his masterpiece.

'Com' on! Hurrup!' said uncle Miah. 'He won't know. Wha' he don't know, he.'

The front door opened out, and my dad, the master craftsman, was carried shoulder high, by the tradesmen through the streets of Cork.

1. Pre-Christian Celtic fertility goddess.

Peter E. Lugg

SIS

When I was four or five
and you old enough to know better,
you washed my mouth out
with a cake of green soap:
I had dared to swear mildly.

You married not long after.
Housing Commission house
and children soon followed.
You took enough tranquillisers
to calm Saddam Hussein.

The house is near a highway.
Your plaster statue collection
vibrates as each truck passes.
You loll on a sofa watching soaps,
teeth handy in the kitchen
in case someone drops in.

Just before our mother died,
all squeezed in a hospital lift,
you pinched your grown son's arm
for some imagined slight.
In that sad moment, the taste
of soap came frothing back.

Peter E. Lugg, born in Bristol, read Social Science at Edinburgh before becoming Personnel Manager at Kala-Royce, Edinburgh during the sixties and then Personnel Manager at Williams and Woods, Dublin. The author of *Waves*, published six in a newspaper in 1985.

SAHAR KHALEK is a lecturer at Wexford Campus, Wexford University. She has her PhD on Hafiz Karami. Her writing has been published in *Writing Women* and *New Edge*. Her work is included in various anthologies edited by Roger Laver and published by Pyralis Press.

ISAAC LEVIN is a South African writer currently living in London and teaching creative writing. His work has been published in several magazines. *The Slow Show*

THE REVENANT

Was it Heathcliff I saw,
talc-pale, wrapped in a horse rug
taking the waters at Bad Ischl?
The man I saw had the right gypsy face
though his body was stooped with age.
I saw how he watched the porcelain-faced Frau
who massaged his legs with hot flannels:
his daemon eyes smouldered dry ice.
Next day he had gone, so I spoke
to the nurse who had tended his gout.
"Ah ja, you mean Herr Lockwood!
Each year he slinks from spa to spa
in search of some wraith he adored
when he roamed the Yorkshire moors".

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MARTIN BENNETT working for BAC in Saudi Arabia, and previously Nigeria, he has been published in *Stand*, *West Africa* and *Wasafiri*. His book *Loose Watches* was published by the University of Salzburg Press.

ELLEKE BOEHMER is author of two novels, *Screens Against the Sky* (1990) and *An Immaculate Figure* (1993), and the best-selling critical book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995). She co-edited *Altered State? Writing and South Africa* (1994) and edited *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*, published later this year. She lectures in English at the University of Leeds.

ANNE COLLETT studied at the University of London for her PhD in Comparative Literature and now teaches at the University of Wollongong. She has recently guest edited a special issue of *Span* entitled *Gardening in the Tropics*.

PATRICK COLM HOGAN is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Connecticut.

CÓNAL CREEDON has received numerous awards for his short stories, plays and radio and television scripts. His radio drama *Under the Goldie Fish* was listed as best radio programme of the year for 1996 and 1997. He is contracted to write three novels for Poolbeg Press. He is writer in residence at Everyman Palace Theatre, Cork. All his writing is set in Cork City because he says, 'he believes that if I am standing in the middle of St. Patrick's Bridge, then Patrick's Bridge is the centre of the Universe'. [Here I must disagree. Standing on the edge of the sea and the sand on Nobbys Beach in Australia is the centre of the Universe. Ed.]

ALISON CROGGAN has published two collections of poetry *This is the Stone* (1991) and *The Blue Gate* (1997), and a novel *Navigatio* (1996). She has written several libretti and plays which have been produced across Australia. She also works as a critic and edits Masthead literary arts magazine.

KIM FARLEIGH lives in London. His novel *Returning to Paradise* (1996) was published by Minerva and he has written a collection of short stories *Hopeless Tears*. His short stories have been published internationally.

A.N. (DERRY) JEFFARES, having originally intended to take Orders in the Anglican Church of Ireland, became an academic holding posts in Dublin, Groningen, Edinburgh, Adelaide, Leeds and Stirling. He founded ECLALS and IASAIL and is the author of many books. He now lives in Fife Ness, Scotland.

JEANNE JEFFARES, born in Brussels, read Social Science at Edinburgh before becoming Personnel Manageress at Rolls-Royce, Hillingdon during the war, and then Personnel Manageress at Williams and Woods, Dublin. The author of *Taikan's Alphabet*, she is a homeopathic healer.

HARJIT KAUR KHAIRA is a lecturer at Westwood Campus, Warwick University, starting her PhD on Hanif Kureishi. Her writing has been published in *Writing Women* and *Raw Edge*, her work is included in various anthologies edited by Rachel Lever and published by Pyramid Press.

SHAUN LEVIN is a South African writer currently living in London and teaching creative writing; his work has been published in *Stand* magazine, *The Slow Mirror*

(1996), *Queer View Mirror* vols. 1 and 2 (1995, 1997), and the forthcoming issue of *This Is*. He has lived for many years in Israel. This extract is part of a work in progress.

TABAN LO LIYONG is of the same generation as Achebe, Ngugi, Okot and Soyinka; Liyong comes from the still disputed area between the Sudan and Uganda. He is Professor of Literature at the University of Venda, South Africa.

PETER E. LUGG has published poetry widely and is a lecturer at Jamestown University.

JOHN MATEER is from South Africa, he is currently writer in Residence at the University of Western Australia.

DANNY MORRISON was born in Belfast in 1953. He has written three novels: *West Belfast* (1989); *On The Back of the Swallow* (1994); and *The Wrong Man*, a thriller. He gave up political activism to devote himself to writing and reviewing fiction full-time, though in 1997/98 he again began writing political commentary, this time for *The Examiner* (the Irish Republic), *The Irish Times*, the *Guardian* (Britain), the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Germany), and *The Washington Post* and *Boston Globe*. He is presently working on his fourth book and is reworking *The Wrong Man* as a stage play. He is on the West Belfast Arts Committee which is supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

MARK STEIN has published articles on T. Dangarembga, D. Marechera, black British literature, postcolonial theory and is co-editor of *Can 'The Subaltern' Be Read?*, *Acolit Sonderheft*, 2 (1996). He is completing a PhD thesis on black British literature at the University of Frankfurt.

OLIVE SENIOR was born and brought up in Jamaica. Her work includes *Summer Lightning* (1986), *Arrival of the Snake Lady* and *Discerner of Hearts*, two poetry collections and non-fiction titles including *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean*. She lives in Toronto.

SAEED UR-REHMAN a political refugee from Pakistan, he currently lives in Australia where he has won a scholarship to enable him to study for his PhD at the Australian National University, Canberra.

STEVEN WALING has published widely, his poetry collection *Meemawing* (1996), was published by Tarantula. He lives in Manchester and teaches creative writing.

A.K. WHITEHEAD lives in Pontefract, West Yorkshire. His poetry has been widely published. His collection *Another Counsellor* was published by Feather Books in 1995.

BRIAR WOOD is from New Zealand and teaches Post-colonial literature, the literature of the South Pacific and contemporary women's poetry from post-colonial countries outside of Britain at North London University.

OUYANG YU is one of the major writers in Australia of Chinese origin; he has published three books of poetry; two in English, one in Chinese. His translations into Chinese include David Malouf, *Fly Away Peter*; Jessica Anderson, *Tirra Lirra by the River*; and Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*.

KUNAPIPI

FICTION

Elleke Boehmer, Cónal Creedon, Kim Farleigh, Shaun Levin

POETRY

Martin Bennett, Alison Croggan, Patrick Colm Hogan
Harjit Kaur Khaira, Taban Lo Liyong, Peter E. Lugg, John Mateer
Olive Senior, Steven Waling, A.K. Whitehead, Briar Wood
Ouyang Yu

ARTICLES

Anne Collett, "'And Woman's Tongue Clatters Out of Turn': Olive Senior's Praise-Song for Woman-weed'; Harjit Kaur Khaira, 'Post-Colonial Theory: A Discussion of Directions and Tensions with Special Reference to the Work of Frida Kahlo'; Mark Stein, 'Cultures of Hybridity: Reading Black British Literature'; Saeed Ur-Rehman, 'Decolonizing Post-colonial Theory'

STATEMENT

Danny Morrison, 'Dear Future'

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